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Adventure

MAGAZINE

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By CHARLES J. DOYLE

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Adventure

MAGAZINE

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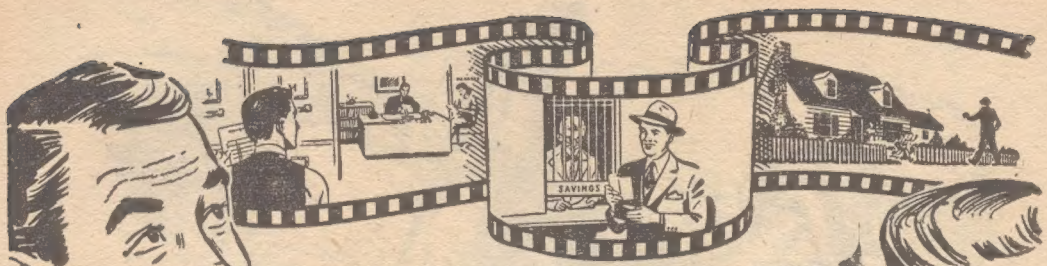

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CAMPING—PROSPECTING

VACATION prospector.

Will you name some of the best locations between the Bay area and the Yellowstone River for a summer vacation to be spent hunting agates or any other gem materials. Also a list of books, publications, and maps that might be useful and where they can be obtained. Any general or specific information you can give will be of considerable value.

M. O. Pewitt
Oakland 7, Calif.

Reply by Victor Shaw: Up your way, there's little save minerals associated with metallic ores in our mines along Mother Lode—and in the serpentine belt from there over to Klamath River.

Nevada's gem minerals are scattered all over the state, but there's agate of cutting quality in western Elko Co. at Tuscarora near Mt. Blitzen on State Hwy-18; also some of various types on shore of Lake Mead north of the dam at Boulder City, Clark County. Other semi-precious stones include excellent turquoise in numerous mines all over the state, also some almandine garnet in the N. W. desert areas; quite a bit of petrified wood, chalcedony, chrysocolla, variscite, common white opal, also the fire opal in Virgin Valley, northern Humboldt Co.

Utah's agate, the best of it, is over in Grand Co. on east side of the state, in the Book Cliffs near the town of Agate. Maybe other locations I haven't listed, but there's some near Cisco, also in Grand Co. Most other semi-precious stones are in or near the Wasatch Range east of Salt Lake: but outside of mine ore minerals, there's a little beryl, topaz, variscite, opal (common), with petrified wood and dinosaur bone that's often radioactive, garnet, and the uranium ore carnotite over along its eastern border with Colorado.

Idaho is known as the "Gem State", but as in all states the stones are scattered over its whole area. The list includes jasper, smoky quartz, amethyst, white opal, ruby (corundum type), star garnet, also sapphire of corundum type like that in Judith Basin, Montana. Moreover, my list has only three countries for any of above stones in the S. E. portion of Idaho lying

In This Month's ASK ADVENTURE

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(Continued from page 6)

anywhere near your proposed line to Yellowstone.

Howver, it might be worth while to go out of your way enough to take a shot at finding some ruby near De Lamar, west of Silver City in northern Owyhee Co.; also sapphire farther north in Adams Co. near Meadows, which is south of Landore in northern part of the county.

Were I on this jaunt, and had plenty of time, I'd head right for Yellowstone Nat'l Park, but take some side trips (going or coming) for certain specimens not found in the Park. No suggestion, just remarking what I'd do. You can have a swell time in the Park and can get all the petrified wood you can carry in the Fossil Forests, along slopes of Specimen Ridge, in the far northeast corner of the Park. Obsidian in those immense beds of ash, mud volcanic cinder. Also there's moss agate in river gravels there, and amethyst in quartz veins in any pegmatite dikes you run across.

If you drive south on return, you could get nephrite jade not far from Lander, Fremont Co.—moss agate at Granger, and opal at Rock Sp'gs both in Sweetwater Co. —and west on same h'way in Uinta Co. At Ft. Bridger you could pick up more moss agate and also at Lyman same county. Some trip, *amigo!*

So, if you care to write me again, I may be able to spot you a bit closer in places, with best place to pick up good turquoise.

Gems & Gem Materials is a very good book, by Kraus & Slauson, price $3.50.—*Quartz Family Minerals*, Dake, Fleener, Wilson, $3.00—*Popular Gemology*, Pearl, $4.00—and, for beginners, *Book of Minerals* by Hawkins, $2.25. All these sold by Mineralogist Pub. Co. 329 S. E. 15th St., Portland 15 Oregon. By the way there's dendritic agate in our own Mother Lode area, if you haven't got some.

PROSPECTING in British Guiana.

My partner and I want to go on a prospecting expedition into the interior of British Guiana. We think you may be able to furnish us some information which would aid us greatly. The questions are as follows:

Are foreign prospectors encouraged or discouraged? Are passports easy or difficult to obtain, and how long would this take? Who should we contact first for the passports? How far can a boat travel up the Maxuruni and Cuyuni Rivers without encountering rapids, falls, etc? How large can a boat be for use on these rivers? Where could we order dependable maps for this area?

David Beard
Climax, Col.

Reply by Edgar Young: As an American citizen you get your passport here by writting to Secretary of State, Washington, D. C., requesting an application which, when properly filled out by you, with small photo attached, and sent back with the ten dollar fee, will bring the document. You then present this to the British consul at port of debarkation, or send it to the British ambassador at Washington to visaed. If you send it to the latter official you will have to write a letter going into details why you wish to visit British Guiana. It would be advisable also to write the Secretary of State this information when you return the filled-out application to him. The rules are slightly tighter during present war conditions than in peace time, but I don't think there will be any hitch in your case.

All British colonies are under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Secretary in London. Also, under British law all ownership of minerals and precious metals resides in the Crown and while you may prospect in one of the colonies after getting the customary license from the local colonial official, you must report the find and then are allowed to lease it from the Crown. It isn't really as bad as it sounds and works out like filing on a claim here in the States.

Believe it or not, there has been considerable prospecting constantly going on in British Guiana for a hundred years or so, not only because there is actually some small amount of gold in a certain region, but also because there is a local lode of diamonds in almost the same vicinity; and much effort has been expended to try to find a lode comparable to the two big ones being presently exploited at some distance down in Brazil, but no dice so far. These diamonds in British Guiana are of high water but small in size—I personally examined a quantity of them that were brought to New York some years ago to be cut.

Also, so far as I am aware, no great amount of gold exists there; and scores of the best prospectors in the world have been on the ground and have made extensive research, in addition to the local Indians and incoming West Indian blacks, and bush prospectors from Surinam where some gold also exists. The only place in British Guiana where there is gold is to hell and gone up the Essequibo above the big falls, and in a rather circumscribed region that fans out from there. The Essequibo is roughly five hundred miles long and while white Americans and Englishmen and West Indian prospectors have made it up stream by river steamer a ways, then by canoe and by portage, it is one rough trip; so that for the past twenty-five years all trips up there and back have been made by helicopter. Additionally, a great deal of the gold and diamond region is already held under lease by British and American syndicates and by individuals.

The map of British Guiana in the *London*

(Continued on page 10)

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Address.....

City or Town.....*State*.....

THE SERVICE LIFE FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Hospital Department J-11, Omaha 2, Nebraska

(Continued from page 8)

Times Atlas is fairly good, but you can only see this atlas in the largest libraries. I know of no dealer in New York who carries English colonial maps in stock. Local maps are obtainable down there.

The other two rivers you mention are comparable to the Essequibo in a general and smaller way. When you get a certain distance inland from the coast you first strike foothills, then a real mountain range, consequently waterfalls of considerable size. In my time I have traveled *up* several tropical rivers but eventually I made up my mind to never travel one unless I was headed downstream and coming down some of them was a real experience, too.

In the big New York libraries there are several books which were written by prospectors and others about the interior of British Guiana, and one of the most interesting I ever read was called *A Tropical Prospector*, which related the experiences of an American prospector and his man-Friday West Indian in neighboring Surinam. If your local library is hooked up to borrow books from either the New York or Congressional Library at Washington, you might get this particular one.

I have done a lot of tropical prospecting, besides just wandering back into unknown regions for the hell of it, and by hindsight I know you are picking a hard way to get into prospecting country in British Guiana. I would rather risk trying it over in Brazil for there is not only a chance of striking more gold, but also of finding that elusive "mother lode" of diamonds. The country between the top of the east-to-west range and the Amazon is impossible without a copter, and some game Tropical Tramps have turned back rather than try it on foot.

In British Guiana foreign prospectors are neither encouraged or discouraged. The bloody buggers are just tolerated or taken in stride.

A DIFFERENT kind of mountain.

I am planning a camping and prospecting trip to Eastern Oregon when I get out of the Army this year. I'd like information on the climate, temperatures, ruggedness, and any other information you think I'll need on the mountains in Baker County, Ore.

All I know about mountain living I've picked up from living in these mountains in Korea. The summer before I was drafted, I made a luggage-sized trailer into living quarters especially for this trip. I am wondering now just how far back into the mountains I can get with it and a regular automobile. The trip is not important enough for me to buy a jeep, which I think would be the best vehicle.

Give me as much information as you think a greenhorn like me should know, and I'll appreciate it very much.

Pvt. Marion Wishard
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Frank Winch: Considering that your air mail from Korea had to go to New York and then forwarded back here to me in Los Angeles it did make pretty good time. In the future you may write to me direct as per my address given in this letter and I trust that you will, in order that I may keep you up to date on the matter of your vacation plans in Oregon.

Baker County is pretty rugged in scenery and historical background. Baker (the city) was once an active gold rush town and is now a prominent mining center located on the Oregon Trail. Baker is often spoken of as the "Denver" of Oregon. Old time ghost towns are still to be found in the surrounding hill country. A gold dredge operates in Sumpter Valley west of Baker. Generally and in all directions there is a vast agricultural, stock raising and mining region out of Baker. But I wouldn't put too much hopes on getting much out of your gold mining efforts. The ground has been well covered and staked out. But, there are a great many chaps who still go in for prospecting and seem at times to be able to pan out enough of the stuff to make a fair living.

All through this section of Eastern Oregon are magnificent mountain ranges which now are traversed by smooth fast hiways. That is between city and city. Mountain streams are loaded with trout and other game fish as are the numerous lakes—for hunting one has grouse, quail, deer, bear, elk, cougar and bobcat. And knowing where to hunt and fish one need never fear of the larder getting too thin. Of course there are game laws and game wardens to enforce them but the right sort of a guy doesn't mind the restrictions. And he plays the game as a real sportsman should. There'll be plenty time later on to go into details of hunting and fishing license—fees—game laws and etc. The seasons are long and the fees very low. As a matter of fact I believe there is a big reduction in fees for ex-service men.

The climate in this area is this—snow in March and April with frosty mornings and much sunshine during the late season. Summer temperatures are high in the lower valley areas, but nights are usually cool. Rain fall is slight. September and October are fairly dry, with many warm days. Considerable snow in November, also rain. Winter—heavy snow fall in the mountains; zero or below temperatures are frequent. January is the coldest month of the year. But, having tasted Korea weather you won't be too much bothered with the stuff we have in Baker County. Needless to tell

(Continued on page 102)

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RUSH COUPON NOW

IN TUNNEL contract work, each second drips with money. On the Kokomo diversion job, Dave Cannon and Holy Gibson saved their brass sixty thousand dollars worth of time by ignoring his orders. When he found out he fired them both. They had worked for him twelve years. He fired them with a minimum of words, and his only emotion was disgust.

"You cost a man's life," Brutus Shipkey said. He wrote the checks himself. "I'd rather have lost the tunnel."

Gibson, a chunky man with short wire bristles for hair and the stubby features of a prize fighter, was one of the few real underground engineers in the United States. Big red-headed Cannon was a tunnel man, up from experience; there are no books to guide the way. The breed is rare.

Now they were nothing. The name of Brutus Shipkey lay so heavy in the world of tunnel work that no top outfit could afford to hire them, unless they wanted to be tunnel stiffs and go back to a drill or scaling bar.

Cannon's whole nervous system jerked when he saw the black-garbed figure standing in the gloom behind the floodlights.

WHEN EARTH GODS KILL

By

STEVE FRAZEE

A Novelette

Holy Gibson thought it all over for two hours. He spent the next three days convincing Cannon that they were not done with Shipkey at all. Gibson's proposal matched his methods of engineering—use facts and proved principles as far as they will go and then strike boldly out with common sense and guesses—and pray a little to the gods of the underground world.

"We've worked for Shipkey long enough," the engineer said. "Now let him set us up in business. With his backing, about three hundred thousand dollars worth, we can take on the Panlap job."

"You have a large hole in your head," Cannon said. For three days he listened to Gibson, sometimes looking at him with wonder. At last they both went to see Shipkey.

The old man sat behind an enormous desk with nothing on it but one of his elbows. What he knew of men and rock he carried in his head, and someone else could do the paper work. A bullet head of short-cropped white hair, two tough, old eyes in an old, tough face. Sometimes Shipkey looked at men for five minutes without speaking, and then they often had to lean forward to catch his voice.

Linda Shipkey, his daughter, was sitting near the window. Cannon glanced quickly at Gibson; the engineer must have seen to it that she would be here. If Shipkey had a weak spot, it was his daughter. Three days ago, Cannon had a thought he was pretty close to marrying Linda.

She would be expensive; she had never indicated otherwise to Cannon. She was not beautiful. Beautiful women, like engineers, were a dime a dozen in Cannon's book. But there was only one woman like Linda and only one man like Holy Gibson.

Under a cap of gleaming brown hair Linda's face tended toward roundness. She had been a chubby kid when Cannon first knew her. Now she was merely full riggid.

She was not for a tunnel stiff. The story of the inevitable course of true love had been dropped from Cannon's reading list when he was sixteen. He was at the bottom of the hill again, and Linda was Brutus Shipkey's daughter.

So Cannon said hello as casually as Linda greeted him.

They did not have to say hello to Shipkey; he would not have answered anyway. He sat there at his desk with one side of his square face supported by the heel of his hand. He looked at them from cloudy eyes, disillusioned but not bitter.

His main expression was waiting.

HE PUT the weight of silence on them. For three days Gibson had filled the air with talk, but now he had nothing to say. On the job Gibson went at a half-trot all day long, but now he settled back into his chair, stretched out his legs, and gave the silence back to Shipkey.

The engineer's attitude said: *We didn't come here to beg.*

A faint smile moved across Linda's lips. She was enjoying this.

Cannon had tried to build arguments to meet the situation. The moment was here. The arguments were no good now. He followed Gibson's lead and remained silent. It surprised him when Shipkey at last showed irritation.

"Well?" Shipkey said.

"We want the Panlap tunnel," Gibson said.

Shipkey considered that. The extensions of the enginer's flat statement began to narrow the old man's eyes, as if he could not believe what he was thinking.

"We want you to back us on the Panlap tunnel," Gibson said. "Cannon and Gibson."

"I'm damned!" the old man said, intensely, so softly they barely heard him. He glanced at his daughter.

"Between the two of us we've spent a quarter of a century making you fat," Gibson said. "Now let's change sides for a while."

This was where they would be thrown out, Cannon thought. Twice in twelve years he had seen Brutus Shipkey blow sky-high. For several moments it appeared that the third explosion was coming.

Then Shipkey said, "So you two helped make me fat?"

He let them both remember. Cannon had been running a backhoe for a construction outfit that was going broke, and Gibson had been setting stakes, keeping time and running errands for the same company when Shipkey took them from the jobs and began to make tunnel men of them.

Twelve years ago. He started them as scalers, men with long bars prying loose rock from the ceiling after each blast in the tunnel. They went to the drills as chuck tenders, then drillers, then walking bosses. Two years ago they had become Shipkey's right-hand men.

Shipkey sat there and let them remember.

Gibson's approach was wrong, Cannon thought. Nobody had ever bulldozed straight over Shipkey. They should try again to explain that it was not their fault a man had been killed in the Kokomo. They should start from there.

Murderers, he had called them, speaking the word calmly. They had struck bad ground in the Kokomo, soft granite filled with talc seams. Shoot short rounds and put timber in at once, Shipkey said. They did that—it was slow, and so they drilled and shot full rounds, pulling ten feet of rock from the heading at every blast.

Some soft ground will hold until the air begins to loosen it. They knew that, and they had the timber ready, rushing it forward. In one fifth of the time Shipkey had expected, they had made a thousand feet.

They were almost through the bad ground, laughing to themselves about the expression that would be on Shipkey's face when he heard the news of the money they had saved him. A scaler grew careless. Standing on the muck pile one graveyard shift, he tapped a coffin lid with his long bar.

Coffin lids are great slabs of loose rock overhead. A man stands back from them, angling up his bar to bring them down. Sometimes it takes no more than a touch. This one was such. The scaler merely tapped it, standing directly under it. It smashed him down into the waste pile and sprayed his blood across the shattered rock and drove the blunt end of the bar through his body.

He was an experienced man and he should not have died that way. Experience breeds trust, yet rock overhead can never be trusted. A new man would have been clear by five feet and the length of his bar.

Instead of taking to Shipkey the news of progress made and money saved, Cannon and Gibson had to tell him that a man had been killed in the Kokomo—the first man ever killed on a Shipkey tunnel job.

So Brutus Shipkey fired the right-hand men who had become like sons to him, not for violating his orders, but because they had lost a man. They were in charge of the Kokomo. The scaler's death was theirs.

No, it would not do to go back again now and try to prove to Shipkey that the man might have become careless in any kind of ground. If they had not been hurrying so. . . .

There was silence in the room. Cannon looked at Linda. She met his glance squarely, and he could not tell what she thought. Linda knew tunnel work, so well that she would not talk about it to men.

"That's it," Gibson said. His stubby fighter's face was as tough as Shipkey's gaze. Holy Gibson because he did not drink, smoke or gamble; tough because his mind was not hamstrung by pure intellect.

"You've got your guts, Gibson," Shipkey said. "You had to talk Cannon into this, didn't you? What do *you* think, Cannon?"

"Stake us on the Panlap," Cannon said. "We'll run it through and make some money all around."

The old man's eyes flicked to his daughter and then back to Cannon. "It ain't just money. That won't be enough, Cannon."

Cannon said, "Maybe not. You've ruined us, Shipkey. We'll never be top men for any outfit again as long as you hold the Kokomo against us."

"I do. I will, forever. Damn the pair of you." His expression, hard and brutal, added, "Murderers."

They had been as sons to him because they loved the same work he loved. He had taught them what they knew of tunnel work, never showing them affection or mercy. Nor would he now, Cannon thought. They had betrayed not him but the values he stood for: *If you can't build things without crippling or killing men, you don't belong in construction.*

TWELVE years wiped away. Cannon stared at the old man's face. Not everything of those twelve years could be cast aside so quickly. But there was nothing on Shipkey's face that said otherwise.

Cannon said, "We can finish the Panlap. You know how bad the country needs lead and zinc."

"Don't wave any flags at me," Shipkey said. "What you mean is you two need a job. You got the guts of a government mule to think I would use my money to back—"

"Yes, we need the job," Gibson said. "We need it from you. You're the one that wrecked us, and you're the one that had better give us a chance, or else no outfit in the country will want us as anything but tunnel stiffs."

"I know that," Shipkey said. "I'm satisfied."

"We're not," Cannon said. "We're better tunnel men than you ever were. We can prove it on the Panlap. You quit that job."

"Their money ran out!"

"You would have quit anyway," Gibson said. "I know, you didn't want to take any chances with men's lives. We can put the Panlap through and never lose a man."

"The hell you can. You don't know what that tunnel is."

"It won't take us long to find out," Cannon said.

"You owe us the chance," Gibson said.

"I owe you—" Shipkey choked on anger.

They had him, Cannon thought; whenever anyone jarred him away from his coldness, he could be maneuvered.

They went to work on him deliberately. They insulted him, they challenged him. It was the only way, Cannon thought. He saw Linda's eyes grow dark with anger and knew she would make him pay for this later.

At last Shipkey said, "All right. You can have the Panlap, on my terms. The minute there's a serious injury, you two are done. I mean, you're promising now never to work a tunnel job again, in any capacity, if you get anybody smashed up on the Panlap."

"To hell with that," Cannon said.

"Tunnel men." Shipkey smiled grimly. "A two-bit engineer who guesses his way through rock and a shovel operator who'd like to marry my daughter. I thought you'd drop your tails and run."

Something had slipped. Shipkey was on top now. In fact, he had been on top all the time, Cannon decided.

Gibson said, "We can do it your way. You won't see us high-tailing it from the first run of dolomite sand."

"Is that a fact?" The square-cut old face hardened. "You'll spile that sand, won't you? That's a word you two never heard of before I took you off a Joe McGee road job. You might be able to do that." He looked at Cannon. "Do you take it or not? You were begging hard enough a minute ago."

It was an effort for Cannon not to look at Linda. "All right. We'll take it."

Shipkey said softly. "The sand is nothing. There's something else about the Panlap. Of course, it won't take long for a smart pair like you to find out everything, will it?"

They stood on the curb outside. Cannon had an uneasy feeling that they had not put anything over. They had been in South America when Shipkey Construction started the Panlap, but they had heard the rumors that the old man was glad to drop the job.

"Just sand?" Cannon asked.

"The sand, lots of water—I don't know what else. You know how the old man keeps his mouth shut. We'll find out."

The hard way, Cannon thought. When any job threw Brutus Shipkey. . . . He watched a cop writing a parking ticket for Gibson's station wagon.

"Somehow he got us over a barrel," Gibson said. "But we'll show him."

They walked on down the street to the station wagon. Gibson didn't see the ticket until he was inside. Shipkey's car was just ahead, and the flag was down on the meter. The cop glanced at it casually and went on.

CHAPTER 2

THE Panlap mining district was a gigantic basin lying ten thousand feet high. Its smelters were long dead, the gallows frames above its shafts were rotten, the twenty thousand who had been here when lead and zinc came from the earth day and night were now less than one hundred, old men puttering in neat gardens among the ruins.

Pumping water had always been a fearful problem in the Panlap mines. Few workings had lasted long below eighteen hundred feet. The ore was still down there, and so was the water.

When the need for lead and zinc was

acute during the second world war, the Panlap drainage tunnel had been started four airline miles from the basin. It was planned to come under Panlap seven hundred feet below the average depths of the mines, to drain the workings, to make available untold tons of needed metal, to serve as a central working passage to all the great producers.

It was not finished before the war ended—there seemed to be no great need for it then. Demobilize everything. But wars do not end, and now there was both need and money once more.

Cannon & Gibson, a brand new name in tunnel contract work. Their contract had a time limit, not set by Brutus Shipkey, but put there by the companies who were putting up the money to reclaim the flooded Panlap district.

They started where the others had quit, in the sand. Dolomite sand is so fine it runs like water, and it seems to run forever. In the Panlap region it is a hellish problem underground. Sometimes tunnels are run around the areas filled with sand, but the detouring is a matter of chance—the sand may be worse to the right or left.

Cannon and Gibson went straight through. They spiled. Around the sides of timber sets and over the caps they drove with pneumatic hammers almost one hundred thousand board feet of three inch planks before they ran through the sand to hard granite. Progress went by inches against the ever-flowing grains. It cost them time and money.

Somewhere above them was a mighty void where sand had poured away, but they were timbered safely down here. Let the concrete men who would come later have their little problems also.

Shipkey came to see the tunnel a dozen times, arriving at any hour, asking no one's permission to go in. He found little things wrong here and there. On stretch of airline was not pegged properly to the wall; it might fall and injure someone; there were loose fish plates in the track; the pipe of an oil stove in the bunkhouse was not insulated where it went through the wall.

They corrected these trifling errors, but each time Shipkey came he found a few more minor oversights. Cannon and Gibson climbed their safety man—he worked hard, but Brutus Shipkey had been driving tunnels before the safety man was born, and so the old man could always find a few details to point his finger at.

Shipkey never mentioned the sand they had gone through. He did not ask how deep they were. He knew. His quietness implied that he knew much more about the Panlap than they ever would.

"He makes me nervous," Gibson said. "He's too damned quiet."

Cannon was suspicious too, but he had time to wonder why Linda never came with her father. Maybe that was the punishment for trying to browbeat the old man to get this job.

It went too well. Day after day the white *X* that Gibson painted on the tunnel breast to mark the center of the bore was transit-straight toward the planned heading under Panlap. They were in more than three and a half miles. In two places they had to drill holes into the walls of the bore and pump concrete under pressure to reduce bursts of water that lay across the tunnel in sheets.

That cost time, but they were still ahead of the game. Gibson was suspicious when things went too easily, and Cannon was edgy when one problem did not follow soon upon another. They kept remembering Shipkey's quiet confidence, his lack of questions.

"What have we overlooked?" Cannon asked.

Gibson said, "I've tried to check from hell to breakfast. I don't know."

Then, in two days the volume of water running in the ditch under the track jumped from seven thousand gallons a minute to twelve thousand. That was nothing in the Panlap district; several of the deeper mines had pumped three times as much day and night.

Gibson did not like it. "What's the name of that first mine we go under?"

"The Buffalo—Elk—the Coyote—hell, look at the map."

GIBSON took the sheets off the rack. "The Wolf. It says here nineteen hundred feet to the bottom level." He frowned. "We'll be under that all right, but where's all the water coming from already?"

"This country floats on water," Cannon said. "We've crossed a drainage fissure.

Of course we're getting some Wolf water."

"We're getting too much all at once."

"Yeah." Vague worry based on the remembrance of Shipkey's quietness ran in Cannon. "Let's go dump some chloride of lime in the Wolf, and see how fast it comes through."

They drove to the old workings at the lower end of the Panlap Basin. The lower levels of the Wolf had been abandoned fifty years before, the upper levels kept open to desultory leasing for twenty years longer. The shaft was a crumbling glory hole in the middle of dumps that covered acres. There were rock and mortar boiler foundations still standing. Out from the shaft, dark rot stains on the gray waste marked the fallen gallows frame.

Gibson walked around the dumps. "She was a whopper. There must be workings down there to chill your blood." He hunched his shoulders as if sudden cold had come down from the peaks. "Shaft work! I wouldn't have liked that."

"Who made that map that says nineteen hundred feet, Holy?"

"That young engineer who chased around with Linda during the war. He gathered up all the dope on the Panlap mines for Shipkey."

"Was he any good?"

Gibson grinned. "Linda turned him down when you came back from South America. The old man fired him."

"How'd he know how deep the Wolf is? There wasn't a single level map of it in that bunch of papers Shipkey gave us."

They looked at each other for several moments. A whisper of wind ran across the enormous wastepiles; and a cold thought lay between the two men.

"You're thinking it could be deeper—right in our way down there?" Gibson asked. "Don't crowd us, Dave. We haven't got too much clearance now."

"If it's deeper we've got to know."

Gibson stared at the funnelled collar of the old shaft. He said, "We've got to know exactly."

They dumped ten sacks of chloride of lime down the sloping sides. They heard the sullen *choom!* of water far below. Surface water, underground water—the eternal snows on the mountains soaked into the earth. Every mine in the basin was a tremendous reservoir.

There would be in the bottom of the Wolf caved rock, jackstraw tangles of fallen timbers, the mud and slime of fifty years. No manual method of measurement would work.

Gibson shook his head. "I remember now. I wrote the Wolf heirs for any dope they had. All they knew about the Wolf was that it made a lot of people rich—and then they asked how long it would take to drain after we drove the Panlap through." His eyes were tight. "Let's find an oracle."

They went past blocks of dead houses in Panlap before they found a human being. He was not old enough to have worked deep in any of the mines, and he did not have the look, either, but they stopped to talk to him.

"Do you know any of the old-time miners here?" Cannon asked.

The man had a ready grin. "Huh-uh. I'm more interested in the ones that will come when that tunnel below camp begins to open things up here again. I'll be ready for them."

"Beer joint, cathouse—one thing and another, huh?" Gibson made his disgust clear.

"That's the general idea," the fellow said. "You know exactly how long they're going to be on the tunnel? I've heard—"

"It's a ten-year job," Gibson said. He drove on down the street.

They found two old men who knew nothing of the Wolf. They had worked only at the Elk, they said, which was good enough for anybody.

One of them said, "Try Joe Detwiler. He used to be at the Wolf, I think."

JOE DETWILER was picking raspberries from bushes shoulder high beside a white painted house. He was a wrinkled neck stemming up from a gray woolen jacket, a pair of watery brown eyes under the brim of a new felt hat with a feather in the band.

"The Wolf? I was boss timberman there for over twenty years." A bleakness touched his face. He sat down on his porch with the pan of raspberries in his lap. "You fellows from the tunnel?"

They introduced themselves. His grip was weak, his hand thin and narrow.

"How deep is the Wolf shaft?" Gibson

questioned the old Man. "Do you know?"

Detwiler shook his head. "You ever hear of old Brutus Shipkey?"

"Yeah," Cannon said.

"Well, he wanted to know that too, not long after the tunnel was started the first time. I couldn't tell him. Big Jack Robey couldn't tell him, and Jack worked on the bottom level before it was flooded out."

"You must have heard a figure," Gibson said.

"Sure," Detwiler said. "Around twenty-two hundred feet, but I couldn't guarantee that. Jack Robey says that's about right, but he admits he don't know for sure."

Gibson's green eyes held Cannon in a narrow grip. If the Wolf was twenty-two hundred feet it was squarely in their way, and the Panlap drainage tunnel was headed into death with every slam of the drills.

This, then, must be what had made Shipkey so sure and quiet.

"We have a map that indicates nineteen hundred feet," Gibson said. "I'm wondering—"

Detwiler said, "I can tell you who made your map. A young slick-boot engineer that worked for Brutus Shipkey. He measured the Wolf shaft with a wire and a lead weight." Detwiler smiled. "What he didn't know was about the leasers who gouged around the upper levels for years after the mine was flooded out below the tenth level.

"You know leasers. They dumped their muck down the shaft. All they ever hoisted was ore."

"Didn't you tell the engineer that?" Cannon asked.

"He never asked. He was a smart lad and he didn't need answers from old duffers like me and Jack."

They went to see Big Jack Robey. His shack was filled with pictures from the days when he had been a double-jack drilling champion. He was eighty-one now, a great frame with the flesh sagged away, but still the semblance of an athlete's grace in his movements.

"Twenty-two hundred, I think," he said. "A hoistman could say for sure, but all the Wolf hoistmen who worked there when the bottom was open are gone now?"

"A drift east of the bottom?" Gibson asked.

"There was, only to the east. The richest ore in the camp came from there. We worked like fiends in water that was never lower than your knees, no matter how good the pumps were working. One night a pump played out. The water was chest-deep before we got out of the drift and up the ladder to the next level.

"They fought it out just one summer, as I recall, before the water got too much for us. There's a five-foot breast of ore down there yet. I mean it."

"Stope above the bottom level?" Cannon asked.

Robey shook his head. "We never had time to stope."

"How far east does that drift run, Mr. Robey?" Gibson asked.

"I can't be sure, of course. A man forgets some things and then makes up answers that seem natural. But I recall it was anyway two hundred feet. It seemed longer the night the water almost got us."

They talked very little on the way back to the camp at the portal of the Panlap tunnel.

LINDA was in the office. She took one look at their faces. "So you found out about the Wolf?"

"You knew, then?" Cannon asked.

"Yes."

"Your old man didn't hold out a set of maps on us, did he?" Cannon was angry.

Linda threw her anger back at him. "That's a stinking thing to say! I crawled through half the attics in this state trying to find level maps of the Wolf during the last war. I've still been trying, for you two."

"I'm sorry," Cannon said. "I knew old Brutus wouldn't do a thing like that. Did he go in?"

Linda nodded.

Gibson was already putting on his rubber clothing.

They went in on the bulldog, the squat electric engine that moved all tunnel traffic. Behind them the square of portal light grew smaller and smaller. Under them the gushing water sounded endlessly. They went a little more than three miles, to the last big station back from the breast.

Silent Anderson was there, greasing his mucking machine. He nodded. They left the bulldog and went on toward the heading. And now the belting clamor of the

drills came to them stronger and stronger. The lights strung on the ceiling could not kill all the dripping gloom of the underground. The dark and wetness belong down there and they let a man know always that he is the intruder.

At the sound-shocked heading of the bore Shipkey was standing beside a battery of floodlights directed on the steel staging and the two teams of drillers. On the top deck Evan Perko changed steel in Spud Tipton's drill, guiding the new steel into the hole. The air was slamming again almost before the chuck was locked. It was deft, savage, quick—tunnel work.

Shipkey saw the two men come up. He studied their faces for a moment. He nodded, and then he looked once more at the black-garbed drillers surrounded by their thunder and a gauzy curtain of vaporized oil blown down the airlines to lubricate the drills.

Gibson dipped his hand into the water. He smelled, and then he tasted. He looked quickly at Cannon. The chloride of lime they had dumped into the Wolf was here already. Down through the ancient crevices, down from the mighty column of the shaft.

Shipkey looked at them without expression. The floodlights threw a shifting gleam on water dripping from his hardboiled hat. Gibson pointed straight ahead. His lips formed the word Wolf. Shipkey nodded: *Of course.*

With the taste of ice water on his lips, with the cold feel of terror creeping into him, Shipkey looked at the breast. Every biting turn of the drills was putting them closer.

Picture the Wolf waiting there ahead, a great trunk coming down more than two thousand feet from the surface, with all the levels standing from the stem like horizontal branches; and then between those levels were vertical raises and tremendous stopes where ore had been removed.

Touch the Wolf anywhere and it would explode its cold water power into the Panlap, driving its debris before it like shot down a brarrel. It would gut the Panlap.

The thunder of the drills washed over Cannon. Gibson's mouth was tight as he stared ahead, trying to see through rock. Old Brutus watched them calmly. Until they knew otherwise, they must accept the miners' figure of twenty-two hundred feet, which meant they were not sure of anything about the Wolf.

The drills chewed rock and splashed it from the holes and drove deeper into the streaming breast.

Cannon tapped Gibson's shoulder. He made a slash mark in the air to indicate the Wolf shaft. He made accordion motions with his hands, asking, *"How far to the right of the shaft are we?"*

"One-two-five," the engineer signaled. One hundred and twenty-five feet.

The figure, Cannon knew, was based on the assumption that the Wolf shaft was vertical, like all the major shafts in the Panlap district. They had then ample clearance of the trunk, but there was still the bottom drift, or level.

Robey remembered it as extending about two hundred feet to the east. Cannon made the accordion motions vertically. Gibson held one forefinger horizontally to indicate the drift, and then he punched his other forefinger against it. That said, *"We'll run straight into the level."*

They were already too close to the Wolf to make a turn without dropping back. There was no time for that. Cannon could not accept defeat, but defeat kept staring at him. And Shipkey, who had let them stick their necks into a noose, watched their futile signals and made none of his own.

What had he wanted? Why had he done it? Cannon did not know. They had angered him, yes, and they had put a blood blemish on his reputation. That was not enough.

CHAPTER 3

ALL three of them went back to the bulldog. The operator took them grinding down the rails. Sunlight hit them like a blow, and still they had not spoken. Linda was talking to an electrician on the dump. She followed them into the office.

Gibson said, "We know why you were glad to drop this job, Shipkey. We learned that much, anyway."

"Uh-huh," Shipkey said. "You're running blind and you finally found it out. What are you going to do?"

"We'll find out if the damned shaft real-

ly is twenty-two hundred feet deep," Cannon said.

"Fine! Do that." Shipkey let them consider the fact that he had not been able to find out anything about the Wolf.

Linda said, "There must be accurate maps somewhere."

"There may have been—once." Shipkey glanced at his daughter, and then he looked at Cannon. Cannon had never known how the old man felt about marriage between him and Linda.

"You didn't stop the drills," Shipkey said. "You don't know where you're headed, and you didn't stop the drills. I won't stand for that. I'll shut you down."

All the stubbornness in Gibson flared: "You don't know how deep the shaft is! We may be clear under that bottom level."

"You're not going to slam ahead and find out by killing men," Shipkey said. "I can take the tunnel over, make the turn, and finish it. There won't be any money in it, but there won't be any blood either."

"Is that what you figured all the time?"

"You ought to know better."

"What did you figure then, damn you!"

Shipkey was not to be angered today. He smiled. "You're the two big-shot tunnel men that did all the figuring, as I remember. You were better tunnel men than me."

"You can't take it away from us," Gibson said.

"Yes, I can. Read your contract again. If I have to step in here, you two will be not only men who couldn't cut the buck for me, but also a pair of big-mouths that fell flat on the first job they tried on their own."

"You're not going to do it!" Gibson said.

"Not for a while. How far from the Wolf are you?"

"A hundred and sixty-three feet, this shift," the engineer said.

"If you haven't got sense enough to back up, I'll let you go half that distance," Shipkey said. "Then I'm stopping you from killing somebody. I've got time—you haven't. I can put deep holes out toward the Wolf, if I want to. In three or four months, it'll drain."

"I think, by God, you planned to do that!" Gibson said.

Shipkey walked to the door. "Come on, Linda."

She hesitated until the old man was gone. "What do you think?" she asked Cannon.

"We asked for it. We got it."

"I mean about my father."

"To hell with him," Cannon said. "I'm thinking about Gibson and me."

"That sounds natural enough," she said.

Cannon looked at her for several moments. He saw old Brutus in her and he saw the woman in her, and the woman looked at him much longer. But they were old enough to know that love can fall over little obstacles, as well as mountains. The Wolf stood, also, between him and Shipkey's brat.

Linda said, "I'll see you." She went out.

Cannon sat down on his desk. "Where do we start?"

"We find out for sure how deep the Wolf is."

Shipkey and his daughter drove across the dump and up the hill.

JOE DETWILER and Big Jack Robey were the only two men in Panlap who were survivors of the Wolf; they knew of no other living man who had worked there. To the best of their knowledge, the shaft was twenty-two hundred feet deep, and the drift that lay athwart the progress of the Panlap tunnel was two hundred feet long.

Cannon was sure they were talking as honestly as their memories would serve them.

In desperation the contractors went again to the Wolf. They dropped long timbers across the collar and made a small platform, from which they unreeled steel wire with a ten-pound lead weight on the end.

It went down and down into the icy depths of the shaft. One thousand on the mark, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hundred feet. The wire went slack between seventeen and eighteen hundred. They could not work the weight on past the obstacle down there.

"Jammed timbers choking the shaft," Cannon said. "She's come apart that much more since the last measurement that engineer took."

Black water waiting. The dumps were enormous. Each cubic foot of waste up here was water down below, with no account of the ore also hoisted. Far below

the drills were still beating rock, driving closer to death.

"We're done," Cannon said. "Why don't we admit it?"

"I know it," Gibson said, "but I can't admit it. I got you into this, Cannon."

"No. Shipkey got us both into it."

They began to reel in the wire.

"I was thinking of you and Linda," Gibson said.

"So was I. It's a habit I'd better break."

They did not hurry back to the portal—there was no use to try for footage records now.

"Why'd he do it?" Gibson asked. "I used to think there wasn't another man in the world like old Brutus."

"He didn't change any. We lost him a man, and then we tried to push old Brutus around. It's just never been done, that's all."

"He was like a father once," Gibson said. "A damned tough father, but one that you can appreciate after you've lost him."

They went to the heading. The drillers and chuck-tenders were hunched against the steady pour of water. Spud Tipton cut his air. He leaned out from the deck and signaled the driller below. Silence was deadly—it spoke of defeat. There was just the hissing at the air couplings and the steady pour of water.

"She's stinking of an old mine Cannon," Tipton said. "I can smell rotten timbers and slime and—"

"We got noses!" Gibson said. "Run your drill."

"This old Wolf mine ahead—there's been some talk—"

Cannon said, "We'll let you know, Spud. Nobody is going to get smashed."

"You're damned well right," Tipton said. "I ain't going to get caught in here. I'm quitting on this round."

"Got it up in your neck, huh?" Cannon said.

Deep in its ancient seams, the earth groaned, then sent rapping noises. Tommy-knocking, old-time miners call the sounds, the ghostly signaling for help of all men killed underground, whose bodies still lie beneath the rock. Down through the centuries the Tommy-knockers have rapped for succor, to see the light again.

The drillers knew the sounds for what they were, the endless settling of the underground; and they also knew the legend. Their eyes rolled white as they looked at the breast and smelled the odor of the Wolf and listened to the water.

"I got it up in my neck, yeah," Tipton said.

"Stay with it a few more days," Gibson said.

Going toward the station, Cannon said, "What was the use?"

"What's the use of sitting on our tails and whining! We'll go as far as we can."

Gibson was sore enough to slam head-on into the Wolf. Cannon said, "We're not trying any by-guess and by-God deals of yours, Holy."

"We're going to give up, huh?"

"What else have you got to do?" Cannon was angry too. "If we tap the Wolf we'll lose twenty men in seconds. We'll lose everything."

"We lose anyway."

They let it go at that, walking on in silence, suddenly hating each other with the unreasonable force that only kinship or long friendship can give to anger.

A WALKING boss at the bull-dog station told them Linda Shipkey was outside and had phoned in for them.

Cannon saw the excitement on her face at once. She hauled him toward her car. The back seat was covered with old maps and papers. "The Wolf!" she said.

Gibson had already jerked open the door and was grabbing.

"One of the Wolf heirs I talked to said his father used to live in Aspen. I found these in the attic of an old carriage house over there. I took everything, maps, time books, records—even two rolls of old wall-paper."

Gibson trotted toward the office with his arms full of papers. "Bring everything!" he yelled.

They unrolled the level maps, sheet after sheet of faded blue. The Wolf was there in hard white lines and sloping letters, the mighty cavities of stopes between the levels, and drifts that ran a thousand feet on both sides of the stem that was the shaft.

"Some mine!" Gibson muttered.

A terrible pile of water, Cannon thought.

The shaft went down with every sheet they turned; with every turning their eyes

shot first to the figure at the bottom of the trunk. And then all the sheets were read and the three did not look at each other for a moment.

There was no map for anything below nineteen hundred and seventy-one feet, but broken white lines on the last sheet ended at twenty-one hundred feet, where neat letters said, *Present Working Depth.* That was for the year of 1900.

Linda said, "Hell, I thought I'd done something useful."

"You did all right," Gibson said. His anger was gone now. "I doubt that there ever was a map of the bottom. The idea was to get the ore, and to hell with any record of where it came from. What you did get here is unusual. Maybe we can—"

"Don't strain yourself, Holy," Linda said. "We've all been let down with a bang."

"Take a walk, you two," Gibson said. "I'm going to get something out of this mess if I have to draw it in myself."

Linda said, "You probably will—and Dave will back you up."

She walked with Cannon out on the sunbright dump, past the piles of rails and ties and timbers that would never be needed by Cannon and Gibson in the Panlap.

The word about the Wolf was out. Top men and electricians testing for a break in a long cable spread on the waste, watched Cannon uneasily. Tunnel stiffs are men who accept the hazards of a very special occupation, learning to use their fear as protection against carelessness.

But the fear is always there, and now they knew about the Wolf. There was only one way to run in the Panlap, out. Three and one half miles. The fear was healthy.

"You wanted us to get through, didn't you?" Cannon said.

"Why wouldn't I want you to?"

There is success in failure, sometimes, but it was not there for Dave Cannon. The Wolf was there, instead, between him and Linda; the patient, waiting Wolf, holding hard to the cold secret of its thousands of tons of water. In a flash of blinding, bitter anger, Cannon thought of how well the mine had been named.

He said, "Old Brutus didn't want us to make the grade, did he?"

"Why not?"

"He didn't tell us about the Wolf."

"No, you two started to tell him everything there was about the Panlap, first."

"Would you have married me if we had made it here?"

"You sound like you'd given up."

Cannon eyed her narrowly. "Do you know anything that says it isn't hopeless?"

"No, I don't."

"My first question was—"

"You put it on the wrong basis, Dave. I wouldn't even try to answer it."

"Well, what the hell basis—"

"I'm tired, Dave. I was up all night driving. I won't stand out here and quarrel with you, not the way you feel right now."

When Cannon returned to the office Gibson was still scowling at the maps. "Why'd she beat it so quick?"

"She's worn out. She headed for that little tourist dump in Panlap."

Gibson did not take his eyes from the maps. "If I wanted a woman, Dave—"

"I know. Old Drive Ahead Gibson. You'd marry her, in spite of everything. That's talk, Holy. That's something to make the ribbon clerks wiggle and beat their chests."

"Yeah, it is." Gibson forgot the whole matter in an instant. "So far, we haven't got a thing here."

Still thinking of Linda Shipkey, Cannon picked up a payroll record. The figures bored him instantly. He took a foreman's timebook for 1885. The leaves were brittle, the ink faded brown. He read the names of forgotten men, the records of shifts worked in a dead century, slanting lines that marched in tiny boxes toward the end of months.

In June, 1885, three men had not finished their shift. Killed on 14th level. Cannon put the book aside.

Shipkey's father and his grandfather had died in another mine when Shipkey was a boy, killed the same moment by a cave-in. Old Brutus never talked of them, or of the old, brutal days of mining. Maybe his uncompromising attitude toward safety was a living memorial to men and events never mentioned in talk.

Gibson glanced up. "Don't sit there staring! Keep digging as long as there's anything to read in this mess!" He returned savage attention to the maps.

Drainage from the Wolf was stinking up the whole tunnel; they did not know where

they were, and here they sat looking at musty papers. Cannon picked up another timebook. It was a record of top men—the surface workers, timber-framers, hoistmen, dump trammers, blacksmiths, boiler men and others.

He found several more timebooks that listed top men, and then the continuity of the years was broken, the last record jumping to 1900. One hoistman's name, Mike Stanfield, was in all the books. Cannon wrote down his name and the names of all the other hoistmen.

He said, "If we could find one of these men still alive he might be able to tell us exactly how much cable went down the Wolf."

Gibson nodded. "Try Detwiler and Robey again."

CHAPTER 4

THE OLD miners were sitting in the sunshine on Robey's porch, framed by the ruins of the flooded mines and the sagging shacks of Panlap.

"Tim Hanna? Yeah," Detwiler said. "He run the big new hoist we got in '87, for about six months. One night in winter he went up to grease the main sheave wheel. There was ice on the ladder. He slipped. The shaft doors weren't automatic then, and they were open."

"She was about fifteen hundred feet deep then," Robey said. "You remember, Joe—we wouldn't let his widow and kids see him?"

"I remember."

Cannon went through the list of hoistmen who had worked at the Wolf. There were some the miners did not remember. There were others they knew were dead, because Robey and Detwiler had been at the funerals.

"This Mike Stanfield was there a long time," Cannon said. "Would he be alive today?"

"He was the best," Detwiler said. "He never jerked a cage, he never missed a signal. Mike was a dandy. His daughter took him away from here twenty years ago, I guess it was." He shook his head. "No, he wouldn't be alive."

"You're sure he isn't?"

"He was fourteen years older than me," Robey said. "He was a thin fellow, and he always had trouble with his stomach. He used to drink goat's milk from the herd old Austrian John ran over in Poverty Gulch. I remember one time when those goats got into Bill Enright's shack—"

"Do you *know* that Stanfield is dead?"

"He must be," Robey said. "I remember helping him into the car when his daughter came after him. He didn't weigh ninety pounds. Her name was Jason then. I knew her from when she was a little girl. She married this Jason and he lost his money in a muskrat farm, and then he up and died of pneumonia one winter—"

"Where did she take him?" Cannon asked.

"Big Bend, I think it was," Detwiler said. "Somewhere down there in the valley. Big Bend or Riverton. I think she married again after Vince Jason died."

Cannon's car pulled into the Sunset tourist court just behind Shipkey's black sedan. The Sunset was a half dozen slab-sided cabins and a cafe of sorts for tourists who took the ten-mile detour from the main highway to prowl the ruins of Panlap.

Shipkey was sitting on a bench near the gas pumps, talking to the elderly man who ran the place. Relaxed, grinning about something, wearing old clothes, Brutus Shipkey could have been taken for an inhabitant of the ghost town.

For one sharp instant Cannon felt that there was too much age in the world, and that it was all weighted against youth. He went over to Shipkey.

"Did Linda tell you about the maps, Brutus?"

"Yeah." The old man appeared irritated by this intrusion on his trivial conversation with the camp owner. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm looking for a hoistman who worked at the Wolf when the cage went all the way."

Shipkey pursed his lips dubiously. "You're starting that a little late. You must not have more than thirty feet left to where I told you to stop."

"Where's Linda?"

"Number Two." Behind Shipkey's cloudy eyes there lay rapid calculation and a weighing.

He would be at the tunnel from now on to the end, Cannon knew, waiting to pre-

vent Gibson from driving beyond the limit Shipkey had set. As Cannon walked away he heard the two men resume their conversation. They were talking about famous trotting horses.

Linda was wearing brown slacks and a brown suede jacket with fringing. When she called for Cannon to come in she was stooping to see her face in a low mirror while she put on makeup. She did not look around at him.

"I'm going down into the valley to see if I can find a hoistman," Cannon said. "I don't know how long I'll be. Tell Gibson, will you?"

She turned slowly and looked at him. "Let Brutus do that. I'll go with you, Dave."

Standing beside Cannon's car a few minutes later, Shipkey looked at his daughter without expression. "I guess you know what you're doing," he said.

She slept all the way down the pass and into the sticky evening heat of the valley. Looking at her resting there in the angle of the seat back and door, Cannon wondered why he had not asked her to marry him long ago, before his life became involved with everything that stemmed from a scaler's careless moment in the Kokomo.

Now, as she had said, the matter was resting on a wrong basis, failure or success of the Panlap.

Neon glare in the narrow streets of Riverton began to rouse Linda. She was fully awake when Cannon stopped in front of the police station.

"How old would your hoistman be?" she asked.

"A hundred and fifty or so. About as old as you look right now."

"Go to hell," she said cheerfully.

The night chief was a huge gray-haired man. He looked at Linda more often than he looked at Cannon. There had been a Vince Jason here, maybe ten years ago, he said. It seemed to the chief that the man had died or moved away. He made a phone call and a woman's sharp voice rattled the line for several minutes after his first question.

The chief hung up. "Vince Jason died in the middle thirties. His wife married a man named Cromwell. Her father was living with her then. He was an old Panlap miner, all right. They all moved to Big Bend or Red Coulee about ten years ago."

Cannon and Linda drank coffee. "We've gained ten years already," he said. "Stanfield left Panlap twenty years ago."

"We'll rent another car," Linda said. "We can check on each other through the police stations."

Alone, Cannon sent his car whining through the night to Red Coulee. By nine o'clock in the morning he was satisfied that no one in Red Coulee knew of a miner named Mike Stanfield or his daughter, a Mrs. Cromwell. He fell asleep in the police station, after his call to Big Bend told him Linda had not checked in yet.

She called him at eleven o'clock. Mrs. Cromwell had died in Big Bend nine years before. No one there knew anything of an aged father.

"She has two daughters in California," Linda said, "and a niece in a little place about sixty miles from here, Standard. I'll try there, after I get a few hours sleep."

Cannon said he would drive over to Big Bend to meet her. In the back of his mind he held the quest for Mike Stanfield a lost cause, but he would run it out to the end. He thought of Gibson trying desperately to wrest something from the maps.

In a few hours the drills in the Panlap would be dead. There would be nothing but the sound of water. Old Brutus would take the job, negotiate a new contract, and let time be his ally. Cannon and Gibson could slink away.

Time and their own overeagerness had smashed them, Cannon thought. He stood in front of the police station. His eyes were heavy and red, his stomach burning from too many cigarettes. The thought of sleep was repugnant.

Time.

Silent drills in the Panlap. Old Brutus looking at Cannon and Gibson without malice, without triumph, merely letting them know what they were—failures that could have been otherwise. Shipkey taught his lessons the hard way.

On the way to Big Bend the whine of the engine was hypnotic. Six or seven times Cannon had to get out and walk along the highway to keep from dozing at the wheel.

Linda was gone when he got to the Big Bend police station. He called the hotels

and found the one where she had stayed three hours and then checked out. A desk sergeant regarded the unshaven man suspiciously.

"She said she'd call you here. You may as well wait."

An hour later the call came for Cannon.

"Dave!" Linda said. "I've found him! Meet me here at the Standard Hotel."

THEY went to the white three-storied building on a dusty street at the edge of Standard. It was called a convalescent home; it was a place where the old and the unwanted go to die. Mike Stanfield lay on a hospital bed, a bone-gray face against the pillow. His eyes were closed.

The matron, an angular woman in a blue uniform, said, "Mike! Mike! There's visitors for you."

One of Stanfield's eyes was blank. The desolation of the Wolf lay behind the film of the other, which for a while did not see Cannon or Linda or anything else.

"He's ninety-six," the matron said, either proudly or with awe.

Intelligence began to burn away the film on the old man's one good eye as he stared at Cannon. "I don't place you, boy, but I'm getting to where I sometimes can't remember like I used to." He said a name that was not Cannon's.

Unless they lay in the long-ago, names would mean nothing to Mike Stanfield, Cannon thought. "We're going under Panlap with a drainage tunnel, Mr. Stanfield. The Wolf mine is in our way. I talked to Big Jack Robey and Joe Detwiler about it—"

"Big Jack. Now there's a man for you. When he goes up on the rock to drill, bet your money, boy." Stanfield smiled and fell asleep.

The woman in blue wakened him again.

"When the cage is at the bottom level of the Wolf, how much cable is down the hole?" Cannon asked.

The old man stared at the ceiling. "You watch your indicator. It rings a little bell each time it rides across the screw. Then I got my marks on the cable, too. I know where that bucket is any time, right to the foot."

"How far to the bottom level?"

"In winter she varies against the summer stretch, but you can adjust for that. Don't you worry none, boy, I know where that bucket stands all the time. I've never hurt a man." Stanfield closed his eyes.

"How far to the bottom level?"

Wtih his eyes still closed Stanfield spoke with the clarity of great age for far yesterdays. "Twenty-two hundred and forty-five feet."

"How far up to the next level?"

"Seventy-five, on the cable. Most of the levels, except the third and seventh . . . but down deep. . . ." The old man's voice whispered away. His mouth fell open and he slept.

"I think you'd better go now," the matron said. "Maybe tomorrow, or some other time—"

"I have to know one more thing." Cannon and the matron looked at each other gravely, both knowing there might never be another time, not even tomorrow.

Stanfield muttered irritably at the efforts to rouse him. At last he opened his eyes.

"Do you mean cable from the shaft house to the bottom, or from the surface to the bottom?" Cannon asked.

"Bottom of what?"

"The Wolf shaft." Cannon repeated his question.

"Collar measurement," Stanfield muttered. "We always figure. . . ." He drifted off again, his breathing light and rapid.

There seemed to be something indecent about stripping information from him and then walking out. Cannon hesitated. Once more Stanfield reminded him of the surface Wolf, desolate, forgotten, sinking away. Tonight, tomorrow—any moment.

"Is there anything he needs, anything he wants?" Linda asked.

The matron shook her head, smiling gently.

At noon the next day Cannon left Linda in Panlap and went on to the tunnel. He saw day-shift men playing poker in the bunkhouse. The big compressors were idling.

Shipkey turned the Wolf maps slowly and said nothing while Cannon told his story to Gibson.

"We'll intersect the line of the Wolf bottom level at twenty-two hundred and six feet," the engineer said, "center point of our bore. We'll have thirty-one feet under the floor and twenty feet of good rock over-

head. We can go right between the two levels!"

Shipkey said, "Those figures spill easy. Damn that kind of engineering. You'd risk men and hundreds of thousands of dollars on the guess work of a dying man."

"Stanfield wasn't guessing," Cannon said. "He knew those figures as well as you know your name, Brutus."

"Suppose there's a stope above the bottom level? What about a raise? You could run square into a raise connecting the two levels." Shipkey shook his head.

"Detwiler and Robey said there was no stope and no raise." Gibson was ready to fight.

"A guess from fifty years of forgetting," Shipkey said. "That's no way to drive a tunnel. I can put deep holes out and let the shaft drain, or I can back off and go clear around the Wolf."

"We can't!" Gibson said. "You let us get our tails in a crack very neatly, didn't you?"

The tough old eyes looked Cannon and Gibson over insolently.

"Sure," Shipkey said.

They rallied to start hammering Shipkey again, to challenge him with violent words and noise. But just in time Cannon realized that would be another mistake. Old Brutus was watching them, waiting for their reaction.

"There's some risk, of course," Cannon said. "Me and Holy will take it, if you'll let us use the crews to drive in as close as we dare to the Wolf. How far are we now, Holy?"

"We're eighty feet away," Gibson said surlily. He had been set for a quarrel and it had not come.

Shipkey said, "You went a little farther than I told you to, Gibson."

"Three feet! My God, Shipkey—" The engineer stopped suddenly. "Yeah, we went three feet farther than what you allowed us."

Now it was Shipkey who appeared irritated because an expected explosion had not materialized.

"You're too close to the Wolf now," he told the men.

"We're in good limestone," Cannon said. "We can shoot full rounds till we get close

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to the ore vein that's supposed to be in line with the Wolf levels. Then Holy and me will drive a pilot bore through."

Shipkey shook his head. "You're trusting maps that might be wrong. You're trusting hearsay from men—"

"Look for yourself, Brutus." Gibson held the Wolf maps toward Shipkey. "Mike Stanfield said the third and seventh levels were farther apart than all the rest. What do the maps say?"

Stanfield had not said precisely that, but he had said the third and seventh levels were different from all the rest.

"I checked that when Cannon told the story," Shipkey said. "Stanfield was right there, but that doesn't mean—"

"It's evidence that he knew what he was talking about," Gibson said.

He and Cannon gathered all the evidence they had to support their plan. They took turns punching it into Shipkey, premise by premise, fact by fact. He knew as well as they that some of it was solid, that the whole of it was tricky; but it seemed to Cannon that he was more interested in their attitude than in their arguments.

This time, instead of anger, they threw logic at him, working as a team. Shipkey listened, weighing them coolly.

Linda's car came off the hill and stopped beside the office. She did not come inside immediately.

"You're not young any more, Brutus," Cannon said, "but suppose somebody drove you out of tunnel work. It would kill you. You're forcing us to retire before we even have a chance—if you don't let us go through the Wolf."

"Kid talk," Shipkey said. "You can go build roads or piddle around with building excavation."

Gibson said, "We've learned our lesson."

"Have you?" The old man gave the engineer a long glance. "You've learned that you can't ride over me. You've tried for safety on the Panlap, but I forced that. Have you learned anything that will bring back the scaler you killed?"

That was damned unfair, Cannon thought; they had suffered enough for an accident that might have happened under any circumstances. He was afraid that Gibson would lose his temper, but the engineer said nothing. Gibson would take anything right now for a chance to finish the Panlap.

Linda walked into a silent room. She did not speak and no one spoke to her. She stopped near Cannon's desk. Her father looked from her to Cannon slowly, and his tough old eyes were unreadable.

Cannon met the old man's stare. "Everything's said. What is it, Brutus?"

Shipkey let the silence hold a while. "No."

It battered deep into Cannon, past anger and regret. *No.* It was a brutal word, a thought that should not be accepted. But in the end he had to accept it because that was all there was. Cannon and Gibson were done.

"That's lousy, Brutus," Linda said.

"Shut up!" The old man stared at her.

"Satisfied, Cannon?" Shipkey asked.

"Hell no, I'm not."

Gibson's face was white. He turned away, looking from a window.

"What about you, Gibson?" Shipkey asked.

"It's your tunnel now," the engineer said curtly. He turned to say more, and then he let it go.

"That's it then," Shipkey said. "You two pups are learning. When you can get hit across the face by a coldblooded no and keep your mouths shut because there's nothing else for you to do, you're starting to learn." He walked to the door. "Go ahead and put the tunnel through the Wolf, if you think you're men enough."

THEY stood at the switch two thousand feet from the heading. The last heavy round had been shot and mucked away. The bulldog, the mucker and all the other expensive equipment had been taken to daylight and pulled around a shoulder of the hill at the portal. Cannon and Gibson were alone in the Panlap now, alone with the water, the Tommy-knockers, and the sleeping Wolf.

Cannon pulled the switch, closing the circuit on primers nested in mashed dynamite in the shallow holes he and Gibson had drilled with jackhammers. The sound was a roaring shock as the electrically timed charges went so close together they made just one tremendous blast.

Their clothing rattled as the concussion waves shot past. The airlines sang a thin metallic song. Weird rings of light chased

each other down the bore. When the sounds had washed away toward daylight the noise of the water seemed much louder than before.

It was water they were thinking of.

Gibson picked up the phone. "All right, so far."

It made Cannon feel a little better to see the engineer's hands trembling.

They sloshed back to the heading through water that was overflowing the track. The exhaust fans were pulling but the sweetish fumes of dynamite came drifting from the shattered rock. From a small station they carried up their gear, the jackhammers, air hoses, floodlights, everything they needed.

Their round had just outlined the small pioneer bore they would drive through the Wolf, perhaps. They mucked back waste to drill again, leaving it to pile up in the big bore.

The floodlights gleamed on the endless bursting of water from ancient seams two thousand feet down in the earth. The odor was nauseous, iron rust, water-rotted timber, old dynamite fumes that cling forever in abandoned mines, and slime and desolation. The terrible pressure of the great water column of the Wolf was squeezing debris through seams the eye could scarcely see.

There was an odor of fear, also, which Cannon and Gibson did not attempt to hide from each other.

The jackhammers, tiny tools for tunnel work, awkward tools, grew heavier after each round. The icy, stinking water kept splashing down. Sometime deep in the night, fighting the rock grimly, Cannon thought he saw the whole face bulging out at him like a rotten sock. He cut his air before he could restrain himself.

Gibson shut down his drill. His voice was sharp. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Cannon shook his head. They were right, he was sure; but they really did not know. There might be open ground or weakened ground within a few feet of them. Any round might smash a thin barrier between them and the Wolf. The dirty water ran, and the rock seemed to move.

"How far are we from the vein?" Cannon asked. His voice came hollowly out of the dark behind him, out of the unknown ahead.

"This round or the next," Gibson said. "It depends on how wide the vein is. Robey and Detwiler said five feet."

And Mike Stanfield had given figures too, dredging them from the deep yesterdays. Cannon thought wearily that he himself could not remember events of three days before.

In his tired brain the rock kept pulsing out at him like a diaphragm that would strain so far before it broke.

Their next shots opened up a shining wall of lead-zinc ore, with the water curling down it steadily. They were tickling the very guts of the Wolf now. It was this vein that miners had followed two thousand feet down into water that stood knee level all the time in spite of everything the best pumps in the world could do.

Above and below them there was open ground. Their margin of clearance, strong when hurled at Brutus Shipkey, shrank tight around them now. Their imaginations could see clearly through the limestone to black water waiting.

COLD and wet, more scared than when Brutus Shipkey took them into their first tunnel, they drilled into the ore. They did not hear Shipkey when he walked up behind them. Cannon's whole nervous system jerked when he saw the black-garbed figure standing in the gloom behind the floodlights.

Shipkey stayed there, silent, unmoving, until the round was in. He said casually, "Sounds solid enough, although cold water can send back a hard sound too."

Something in his voice took Cannon back to the days when they were learning from him, before they began to know more of tunnel work than he did. Cannon could not see the old man clearly, but his words, and a feeling that came from his being here said that one part of the fight was over.

Shipkey had beaten his lesson in; he would never again mention a scaler who had died in the Kokomo. That being so, Cannon and Gibson would never forget.

They began to coil the air hoses, staggering and slipping in the water that lay trapped by the muck pile. Cannon said, "You'd better get out of here, Brutus. We're not through yet."

Shipkey's smile was a brief flash of white seen through the water splashing past his face. He started walking out. He was gone when they discovered the gallon jug of coffee.

"We're in again," Gibson said.

"Yeah. He'll make it tough again, too, when we slip a little."

Gibson simply grunted.

Sometime during the morning they drove through the last of a six-foot streak of ore and into granite on the footwall of the vein. They were past the Wolf.

Others could enlarge the pioneer bore to the tunnel dimensions, timber it solidly, move on ahead slowly with shallow rounds until the bore was safely clear of this area that hung between two levels of the Wolf.

And then the Panlap could roar forward again, to the final heading.

They stumbled back to the firing station. Cannon picked up the phone. "She's through. She's holding. Tell—"

"Stay out of the way," Shipkey answered. "Stuff is coming in." Not long afterward they heard the rumble of the bulldog hauling heavy traffic.

Shipkey stopped at the station briefly. There was a job ahead and he would be there to see that it was done well.

"You got anything to brag about?" he asked.

They looked at him warily. Cannon said, "Thanks for the coffee."

The old man climbed into a muck car and signaled Silent Anderson to take the mucker on in. "You may make tunnel men some day," Shipkey said. "You're starting to learn."

The mucking machine went grinding up the rails.

"That's all we dare thank him for on this job," Gibson said.

Linda was waiting in the office when Cannon went in. She looked as cool and expensive as ever, but Cannon knew it was not so; he could afford to change his mind now.

"You're filthy," she said.

"Don't try to act like your old man."

"Do you think you're a big-shot tunnel man now?"

Cannon grinned, "Between you and me, yes."

MYSTERY ISLAND

Easter Island lies some 2,000 miles from the Chilean coast, 1,000 miles east from the Marquesas, in a great empty region of the Pacific. Twelve miles long, five in width and triangular in shape, it is known as the mystery island of the Pacific. It is of volcanio origin, having an extinct volcano at each corner of the triangle. The peak at the apex is Mount Rano Raraku, 1,700 feet high. The greater portion of the island is in terraces, especially on the eastern side. Ranged symmetrically on these were gigantic carved statues or images and a kind of writing described as resembling the Egyptian glyphs. The terrace walls are built of great blocks of stone morticed and fitted together with great skill. Many of the images, which were carved out of volcanic rock and represent the upper part of the human body, have been removed to museums.

The natives now on the island range from whitish to nearly black and from Melanesian to Polynesian. There is evidence that the original natives who were probably associated with the carvings were either exterminated or absorbed. The natives now speak the same language as those of the Cook group, but how they ever reached Easter Island remains a mystery. The island was discovered on Easter day in 1722 by the Dutch Admiral, Roggeveen, and was annexed by Chile in 1880.

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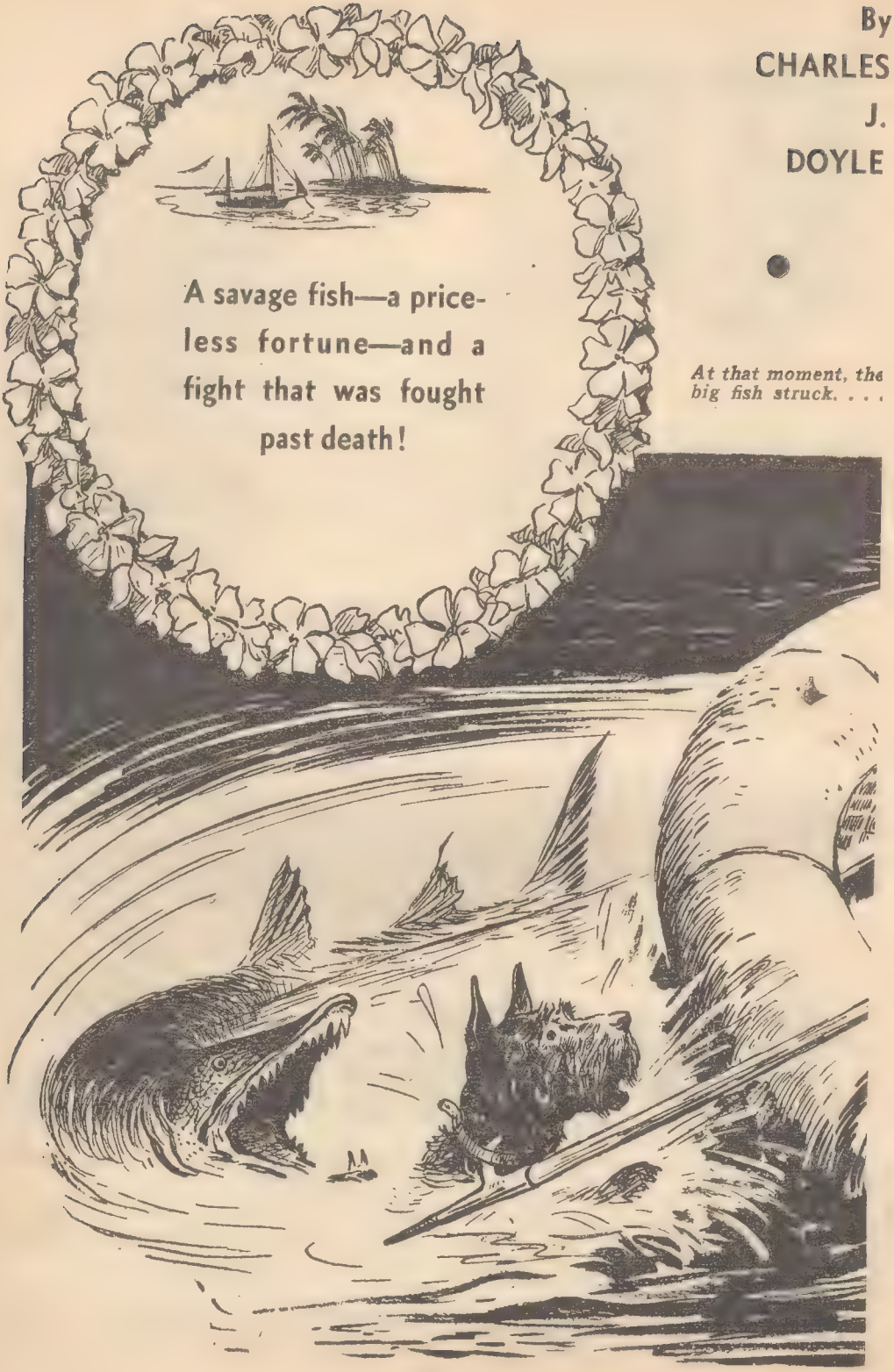
By CHARLES J. DOYLE

A savage fish—a priceless fortune—and a fight that was fought past death!



At that moment, the big fish struck. . . .

BARRACUDA BAIT

SANDERS opened one eye cautiously. He moved his head slowly from side to side, and took a chance on the other one. But nothing happened. The bunk didn't fall away from under him; the bulkhead didn't come crashing down to beat against his expectant brow. He waited a long moment, working his mouth, and grimacing against the sour taste. Then, he rolled his head still farther, and caught the other bunk on the starboard side of the thirty-footer's little cabin with hazy eyes.

"MacTavish," Sanders grunted solemnly, "I'm glad you're not a drinking man. If you were, I couldn't stand you."

At the sound of his voice, the Scotty unwound himself from his half curl, and launched across the three foot space. He landed on Sander's stomach, and wriggled up to begin a frenzied licking of his face.

"Okay. Okay!" Sanders pushed the little dog gently to the deck, and swung his

legs over the side of the bunk. "I know you're dependent on me for your breakfast, but don't be so damn servile about it. Where's your dignity, man?" His bare foot struck the empty bottle that was rolling back and forth between the lockers, as the yawl pitched gently in the morning swell. He stared down at it and wiped his thin hand slowly over his sunburned face. "Yeah, dignity! I don't remember much about it. But the jokes, MacTavish—the jokes and stories—my life history and the gutty, belly warmin' anecdotes I musta regaled you with. Tell me, Mac, was I good, last night?" He grinned down at the jumping Scotty, and lurched up the three steps to the cockpit.

He was a lean scarecrow of a man, running all to length and bony joints and ugly patches of sunburned skin. A wedge of light hair cowlicked over his right eye, making him look younger than his twenty-two years. He looked down at his stained T-shirt, and at the bare feet sticking out the cuffs of the faded dungarees.

"Some dress for a future millionaire, huh, MacTavish? If you had any pride, you'd walk off and leave me right now. But your belly comes first, don't it?"

The early morning sun, coming across the cove on a low tangent, blinded him for a moment. He squinted at the narrow collar of pink sand that rimmed the horseshoe cove a quarter cable length from the anchored yawl. He peered beyond at the tangled, smothering greenness that crept down to meet it. Then his gaze swung over the port rail, and moved along the inner reef. The thin, greenish brown line was anchored to the sand where a worn mound of volcanic rock rose out of the water. It swung in a sharp crescent back to the beach again, to enclose a little lagoon, perhaps twenty fathoms by forty.

The grin on Sander's thin face was wide now. It crinkled his blue eyes and made a little lump stand out on either side of his long jaw.

"See, MacTavish!" He pointed a bony brown hand. "I made her! A back Keys sailor with a two week cram in seamanship and terrestial navigation after the nine to five shift—and I made her. The whole three hundred bloody miles out of Tobreque! You hear me, MacTavish? That's Gil's lagoon for certain." He ruffled the Scotty's ears. "You blame me now for bustin' into our celebratin' bottle last night?"

His gaze sobered as he shaded his eyes with a bare arm, and turned in a slow circle. The incredibly flat and empty planes of a blue sea drifted out and away from him on all sides. They fell away to the edge of the world, and blended into the soaring reaches of an even bluer sky. The immensity of space, and the awareness of utter isolation caught at him for a moment. As he stared, he felt his belly contract with a vague, intangible sense of fear—a sense of indescribable loneliness.

Even at Tobreque where he bought the yawl, he could have hired a Marquesian, but that would have sounded too much like normal intelligence. That would have put him into MacTavish's class. A thinker. Better to function in a class he understood. A wise guy. Besides, Tobreque was three hundred miles and five days sailing behind him. The Scotty put his forepaws against his knee, and crooned inquiringly, and the man shrugged the feeling away, and brought his grin back out.

He had brought the empty bottle up to the cockpit, and now he caught it up by the neck, and reared back to hurl it across the incredibly blue water. Then he stopped. "No, Mac," he said, as he tossed it into the scuppers, "I'm gonna keep that bottle for a measurin' stick. Gil says there ain't a pearl in that lagoon could go through the neck of a twenty-five' ouncer. We'll just start in seein' about that—after breakfast."

HE THOUGHT of Gil, as he fed MacTavish and started in on his own breakfast. Big brother Gil, who'd been staring at a ceiling back home for six long years, whose same wide grin had come out each time the doctors tried to put his back together again.

"Maybe this time, Bucky. Then we're away."

Sanders chewed his food slowly. *Maybe this time, Bucky!* That was the way it had been each time. But when the sixth time was over, the grin was gone from Gil's face. They'd told him and he knew, and the hope that he had kept burning for six long years, flickered and went out.

"It's up to you Bucky. You and MacTavish, and anyone else you want along."

"Just me and MacTavish." Sanders had

said. "It ain't the way I'd planned it Gil, but Mac and I can swing it."

Yeah! Even then, you had to be a wise guy. In spite of Gil's warning. The six years of waiting had polluted your mind till you couldn't think straight. You had to jump off, knowing that two weeks was the limit. Two weeks till the hurricane season set in and the islands tried to shake themselves apart. The return freighter passage to Tobreque had taken the first big bite out of the slim savings account. The trader at Tobreque who had the yawl, had finished it off.

You were one wise guy who had to produce—or else!

Gil had told him again of the pearls—of the Jap striking out of the weather and the ship going down in the night—of the two days and three nights alone on a hatch cover, and the land coming out of the haze of the sea on the morning of the third day. Gil had had four days of it on green coconuts, before he discovered the shell bed, while swimming face down in the transparent waters of the lagoon. He had four more days on oysters, before the big PBY roared and circled over his wildly waving shirt, and settled down in the outer cove. When Gil came ashore for his leave at Tobreque, he had had fourteen magnificent pearls rolling out of his handkerchief. The next morning, when he woke up with his face in the sand, he didn't even have the handkerchief. But he knew where his island was, latitude and longitude to the dot. Then Gil lost his second ship and part of his spine with it, and the tiny spot of jungle with its pink sand beach and its inner reef circling the tiny lagoon faded to a tantalizing memory, four thousand miles away.

Sanders unlashed the small yellow life raft from the top of the cabin, and pushed it overboard. He threw in a paddle, a wire basket, a coil of three-eighths rope with a twenty-pound anchor, and MacTavish. The Scotty landed stiff legged on the round rubber gunwale, and slid outboard. He swam in the lukewarm water with his whisker-rimmed eyes half closed in estatic enjoyment. He circled the raft twice, before he yapped to be taken aboard. Sanders scooped him up then, and directed the raft toward the inner reef with short, strong

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digs of the paddle. When he bumped alongside it, he crawled out on the crumbling coral wall, and pulled the raft over the top of it.

The inner face of the reef shelved down and away from him, meeting the marly bottom at about three fathom. In the crystal water every detail on the floor of the lagoon stood out distinctly. Waves of tiny fish floated like colored streamers in and out of the coral recesses. A small spotted eel came out of the shadows, almost at the man's feet, and made a single, circling pass through one of the streamers. The school shattered and broke like a pane of green and orange glass. The jagged splinters streaked and were gone, and a blue streamer gathered out of nowhere, and formed up to take its place.

The eel made its pass again, and the man grinned. He whistled the dog into the raft, and pushed off again.

HALFWAY across the lagoon, Sanders laid down his paddle, and put his face close to the glassy surface. As he stared, his sun-cracked lips pursed in a soundless whistle. He changed from side to side. He drove the raft a dozen fathoms, and stopped to peer again. He let the whistle come out in a long, thin sound. The sun-flooded bottom had changed to a light grayish hue. The blue white marl was cobbled and overlaid with shell as far as his eyes could see.

He grinned at the dog. "How you like your oysters, MacTavish?"

The Scotty's stump worked furiously at the sound of the man's voice. He jumped up and tried to reach his face, but Sanders laughed and pushed him away, as he reached for the paddle again.

"We'll see how close to shore our gold mine starts, Mac. I mightn't be too good at this, to start."

The bluish tinge was showing through now in irregular patches. The man laid down the paddle, and swung the anchor over. He watched the small puff of mud come up where it hit, and looked at the knot in the rope. Twelve feet. He put a light line on the wire basket, and let it trail down beside the anchor. Then he kicked off his dungarees, and let himself easily over the side.

"So long, Mac. Lock the door if you go out."

MacTavish scampered frantically along the side of the raft. Sanders grinned on a deep breath, put his hands on the rope and pulled himself under. Almost immediately there was a splash above his head and the Scotty was swimming in furious circles, searching for him. He looked up at the frantic beat of the stubby legs, and then his bare feet touched the bottom. Half swimming with one arm, he turned on the anchored rope and surveyed his marine surroundings. He had perfect visibility in finest detail for about thirty feet, before the bottom faded out into a turquoise haze. Curious fans of marine growth grew out of the marl at intervals, and the same tiny streamers of incredibly painted fish floated in and out of the filmy fronds.

The sudden weight on his chest reminded Sanders that he was twelve feet down. He bent immediately, righted the basket and, still holding the rope with one hand, began to claw in the rough shells. He succeeded in almost filling it before the weight became a pain, and he shot to the surface. He let his breath go out in an explosive gasp, and the Scotty came rounding from the far side of the raft, yapping crazily. Sanders put his hand under the dog's belly, and pushed him up before he rolled over the side of the raft himself.

"Control yourself, Mac." He grinned as he ruffled the wet ears. "You'll be worn to a frazzle. Now, let's see what we got." He hauled up the handline and spilled the basket of shells in front of him. Hardly able to control the excitement in his fingers, he took a stub-bladed knife from the dungarees, and began to pry at the lips of the bivalves. He had twenty of them open and dumped back over the side, before he found his first pearl. It was a large, softly colored sphere, rolling wetly in his palm.

"Gil," Sanders breathed, staring down at the soft translucence, "we made it!"

There were no more pearls in that basket, and only one more in the next. But the man was grinning happily.

"You figure the averages, Mac." he told the Scotty as he heaved the handfuls of empty hulls over the side. "We don't want to swamp the market. We just want to. . . ."

There was a distinct hiss beside the raft

—a marine explosion that sent the spray into the man's face, and left his mouth hanging open. He had only the briefest flash of silver spots—of a torpedo-shaped form that bulleted into the splash of the falling shells and ripped away. But the flash was something he had seen too often around the Keys. His breath went out slowly. His hand fastened in the excited dog's ruff.

"We got company, MacTavish," Sanders said slowly. "Bad company! Your swimming days are over, right now." He stood up in the raft and tossed another hull ten feet out. Nothing happened. He watched it see-saw down through the limpid water. He tossed a second and a third. And then the greenish brown shape with the silver spots lanced across the sun flooded bottom, made a lightning turn, and was gone.

"Barracuda, Mac." Sanders said tonelessly. "A hundred-pound six-footer. And I'd be scared of him if he was only half as big!"

SANDERS kicked the discarded gear back into the open lockers, and sank down on a bunk in disgust. He ran a hand slowly through his sandy hair and growled at the Scotty.

"You're associating with an idiot, MacTavish . . . An idiot who comes three hundred miles, before he knows enough to check his gear. Before we can take any more shell, we gotta take that torpedo, and there's not as much as a trout fly aboard." He got up and checked through the cabin once more, and then ransacked the lockers of the cockpit again. Finally he sank down on the stern seat, and shook his head in slow disgust. MacTavish dropped down in front of him, and eyed him with an unblinking, inquisitive stare.

"No use lookin' at me, Mac. I'm not going back down there with that devil for all the pearls that were ever made!" He heaved up and paced the tiny cockpit in helpless frustration. "Wise guy! And Tobreque is out. The weather man gives us one week flat to get our tails out of here." He was poking again through the cockpit lockers, when he spotted the shank of a rusty gaff, half buried beneath a square of mildewed canvas. He straightened with the piece of rusty iron in his fingers, and stared at it a long moment. Then his grin came out again, and he ducked back down to the cabin and lit the stove. He turned up a low blue flame, and put the gaff across the burner. He dug into the tool locker and laid out a pair of long-handled pliers, two files, and a ball peen hammer.

The iron took a long time to heat, but at last it glowed a dull red. Sanders took it up with the pliers, and went to work with the hammer, using the center bilge plate for an anvil. The gaff straightened under his awkward blows, and slowly began to take new shape. After several reheatings and a blistered hand, he had the small end forged into the rough semblance of a three-inch hook. He plunged it hissing over the side. When it tempered and cooled, he hammered the shank into a crack in the deck, and sat down beside it with the files.

Sanders worked until dark, and then most of the next morning. Both his hands were blackened and blistered by now, but he had his hook. It was a slim, three-inch affair, with a needle-like point, and two small, vicious barbs filed into the bend. He had notched an overlap collar at the head of the shank, and filed the gaff through just above it. He scavenged three feet of wire from the starboard halyard, drew it under the collar, and then tied in the baling line. The last thing he did was duck back to the cabin, and rip a hand-sized chunk from the tail of his red shirt.

Sanders walked slowly along the crumbling wall of the coral reef, with MacTavish at his heels. Three times he had whistled the cloth-baited hook around his head, and let the looped coils run off his forearm, as the line followed his long casts. The glassy calmness of the surface remained unbroken. He reached a point midway in the crescent, where the wall was slightly wider, and the footing was good. Again, he swung the wire leader, and extended his left arm, and the cast took all his line. He recovered it steadily, with small, quick jerks, and had brought the hook into sight, glinting in the sunlight, about six feet under, and twenty feet out, when the big fish took it.

He hit straight up, coming out of nowhere and exploding to the surface in a blinding surge that made the man blink. Sanders set his left foot into a water-filled hole in the coral. He dropped to one knee and braced the line over the round of his thigh. The 'cuda rolled with the hook, the whip of its black tail just breaking the sur-

face. Then the line came taut and the man grunted as the vicious impact slammed back to him. The 'cuda went wild with the sting of the barb. He bored straight for the bottom, and blew back on the path of his strike before the man had time to brace himself again. When the six dark feet of bone and muscle blasted into the sunlight in an explosion of fine spray, the line cut through Sander's hands and across his thigh, almost at its end. Furiously, he fought to hold his grip and pick up some workable slack. The 'cuda swept in a whistling run, reversed himself on a tangent, and the man had his slack.

He didn't dare try to recover line with his bare hands, and the big fish at the top of its strength. He simply looped three coils around his fist and braced himself again. There was another blast out of the depths of the lagoon—a savage impact that tore his braced fist from back of his hip, yanked him forward, and sprawled him face down on the sharp coral reef. Then the line was slack and dead in his bruised grip. His forehead and nose were skinned and bleeding from small cuts, and a moment later, he was looking down at the hook at his feet, and cursing silently. The poorly tempered metal had opened. The big 'cuda's last terrible lunge had straightened the hook and torn the inadequate barbs free.

AN HOUR later, Sanders eased the raft out from the sandy beach, moving his paddle softly and carefully, without removing it from the water. He glanced down at MacTavish, held securely in the center of the raft by two lines that ran to each side of the gunwales. The little dog was growling his complete dissatisfaction, and the disgusted cock of the small, wooly head brought a grin to the man's face.

"Sorry Mac. But it's either that, or leave you back aboard. I can't chance you piling in after me and making a splash. That big devil's nursing a sore mouth, and I'm counting on him sulking out deeper by the reef. I don't want you inviting him in here."

He looked over the side, shipped the paddle, and gently let the anchor down on an eight foot bottom. The shell was fringing off and more scattered here, but the man couldn't bring himself to approach the low rim of the reef a foot closer than he had to.

"I'm a fool, Mac, and I know it," he muttered to the dog. "But I gotta take the chance."

He eased down the basket line and let himself carefully over the side. He kept his back to the beach and his underwater stare directed toward the shadows of the reef. With his feet on the bottom, he turned slowly, and a chill prickled along his back as he surveyed the opaque curtain that shut off his vision in a thirty foot circle—a curtain that could be ripped by the sizzling charge of the great barracuda at any moment, and from any angle.

I wonder how far these devils can see down here, Sanders thought. *Maybe he's laying doggo out there, watching me right now. Maybe he's circling around just beyond the curtain, to take me from behind. Maybe he's winding up to start his run, right now. . . .* He shook his head. *To hell with thinking about it! Just keep both hands working and both eyes open.*

He worked the shallow edge of the bed all afternoon. The sun was starting its slope toward the sea, and the raft was piled almost to the gunwales. The man surfaced and blinked through the water in his eyes at the Scotty, growling trying to make himself comfortable on the layers of shell that kept sliding down under him. "Last bucket Mac. We've had a good day." He took a deep breath, and went under again. When his feet touched the bottom, he bent and lifted the anchor again, and walked it out a few more feet. He was cleaning the bed in a thorough, systematic pattern, and was becoming used to the pressure. But how deep was he now? How many times since noon had he slacked the rope and walked the anchor forward? He tilted his head back, and glanced up at the bottom of the raft. It was a dark, immobile oblong on the bright sheet of the surface. But it looked a long way up. It looked all of twenty feet or more, floating at the end of the thin rope. A sudden chill gripped the man as he realized that he had edged out far deeper than he had intended—far closer to the reef—maybe to close. The shells were thick around his feet. The basket was only half full. But suddenly he stopped. He had been grabbing by feel, with his wide open eyes staring watchfully, and his head moving in a constant half circle all after-

noon, and suddenly he realized how tired he was. Besides, this was pushing its too far, and to hell with it.

He turned on the rope, and took a last glance around before springing surfaceward. And a fraction of a second later, he was frozen in a half crouch, with both hands locked to the bight of the rope where it met the anchor. Twenty feet away, in a spot that a breath before had been empty, a long shadow floated out of the fronds of a clump of weed. The great fish hung motionless, three feet off the bottom. The deep set eyes were fixed on the man, and the tooth racked jaws were slightly open. Sanders could see the rhythmic beat of the gill covers, the quiver of the side fins—the minute, almost imperceptible curves of the huge tail.

A bubble burst from the corner of the man's lip and fled upward. Another followed it. A hot iron was creeping down his throat and spreading through his rib cage. How many seconds before the pressure forced his lungs flat, and he had to follow the bubbles? *Do it now!* His mind told him this with a strange objective calmness. Now, while there was still time to do it in the only way that might get you out—with a crawling, slow motion evenness that might fail to attract the terrible charge.

His hand moved slowly to the wire shell basket. Slowly he tipped it and let the shell fall out against the anchor. Slowly he straightened and took a high grip on the rope, with his legs coming up and his knees reaching for his chin, and the wire basket held like a shield between him and the fish.

The small precious bubbles were pouring from the corner of his mouth in an almost steady stream now. The burning iron was an agony in his chest. He was up ten feet, inching the rope between his knees and the fingers of his right hand with maddening slowness. The great barracuda rose with him. Now the tail gave a tiny flick and the long body slid forward twice its own length. *It's coming now,* the man thought. One smash of the tail—a lightning surge—and the razor teeth shorn through the flesh and tissue of half a thigh. A second and third strike instantly following . . . tearing him off the rope . . . battering him to the marl of the bottom with a limb gone and his entrails streaming. . . .

IN THE split-second passages of thought and reasoning that an anguished mind sometimes accepts with amazing calmness, he found himself thinking about MacTavish. How long would the little dog wait, whining and twisting and slipping among the shells, before he finally gnawed through his ropes? How long would the troubled, frowzy-rimmed eyes peer over the side, searching and crying for him, with no way of knowing that he was never coming up again? How long before hunger and thirst drove him over the side, still crying his grief? The man found himself hoping that the little dog wouldn't make it to the beach. Even the murderous strike of the big fish would be more merciful than the agonies of starvation. He and Mac . . . and Gil . . . his head bumped gently against the bottom edge of the raft.

With his eyes still beneath the surface, he curled his right arm up over the gunwale, and was dimly conscious of the rough feel of shell, and of MacTavish frantically licking his numb fingers. He knew he had to have air and he had to have it now. Just one breath to let him act out the last few seconds of his play. His fingers closed over two of the shells as he let the last of his breath go out. A flick of his wrist sent them away. Underwater, he saw them drop and start falling a foot in front of the 'cuda's nose, and to its left. He shot his face out of the water, took a shuddering breath, and submerged again. The 'cuda had slid to the right . . . still the same distance . . . still waiting.

It'd be now. It'd be as he splashed and fought his body off the surface, and the whole unprotected length of him was at the mercy of the ripping strike. But his body was unconciously shrinking from destruction and striving to protect itself, even as he thought. With his right arm hooked over the gunwale, his legs doubled, floated away from the rope, and his belly turned to the raft. His right leg hooked up and over. His left doubled more. His face and his left arm and shoulder would be last submerged. He changed his grip on the wire basket until now it was protecting his doubled left arm and most of his shoulder. His fingers, spread through the rim of it, took a hard grip on the rope. His whole body jerked up and sideways in

a quick convulsive heave, and the gunwale was under his twisting hips. Then, his fist came smashing into his mouth as the 'cuda struck and took the basket fair on the corner of the solid bottom, and the lifting blow rolled him clear of the edge and sprawled him on his back on the rough pile of shell.

The sun had hardly lifted above the curving rim of sea when Sanders was back on the lagoon, hauling the raft over the coral reef again. His hands were blackened and sore again, and his thin sunburned face showed the faint dark lines of fatigue. But the result of his night's work lay across the gunwale in front of him. This time, it was the boathook, with its steel shank heated and hammered and bent and filed into a rough but passable semblance of a harpoon. The deeply notched barbs caught the slanting rays of the sun and glinted wickedly. The man's mouth was drawn into a hard line as he cruised slowly along the inner face of the reef. He had a long sliver of storm-riven palm secured outrigger style across the thwarts, and from the end of it, another chunk of red cloth and two of the galley spoons alternately flashed and dulled as they dangled from a thin line, three feet to his left. The dog got up from the man's feet, peered disinterestedly over the side, and then curled back up in the front of the raft. But the man's eyes never left the twisting, shimmering lure.

"We get him with this, or the party's over, Mac. Just another day or two would let us take enough pearl to come back and have a real go at it next year." He loosed a short, bitter laugh. "Two lousy days, and that big devil down there won't let us have them! I wonder—" He broke off and his hands flashed from the paddle to the harpoon. He was up with his feet spread, one knee braced against the rounded side of the thwart, and his stare going down overside.

The great barracuda rose horizontally off the bottom. It hung motionless a moment and then disappeared in a flash that was too swift for the man's eyes to follow. He stood fully, with his arms half upraised and his knuckles showing white against the wooden handle. His head swiveled slowly as he searched the depths beneath him, with the wicked barb poised and ready. For a long moment nothing happened. Then a long shadow floated out from under the raft. The man shifted his feet like a boxer. His braced knee shot over for a new purchase against the thwart. He felt it strike something, and as his muscles convulsed to drive the harpoon down, there was a splash and MacTavish was in the water.

Sanders flung himself forward and made a lightning grab, but the little Scotty's churning legs were working too fast. "MacTavish!" Sanders yelled. He whipped out the harpoon and slapped the barb into the water just in front of the swimming dog. "MacTavish!" he screamed again, and the point of the barb slid under the collar. He braced himself frantically to yank the struggling dog into the air but at that moment the big fish struck.

The savage blow took the man off balance. His roar of rage blended with the little dog's single scream. What was left of MacTavish came back into his arms, and he fell back into the bottom of the raft with his arms wrapped around the still quivering head and front quarters. Overside, a narrow patch of bloody foam gradually broke up and floated away.

FOR a long time the man sat on the pink sand. His bony knees were drawn up and his thin hands were locked around his shins. From time to time he turned his head and his reddened eyes went down to the little mound beside him. He had stuck the empty whiskey bottle neck down at the head of the little grave. It wasn't much of a marker, but it was all he had. He reached out now and shoved it down more firmly and smoothed the sand around it. Then the hand stopped. His swollen eyes narrowed and swept from the bottle to the mirrorlike surface of the lagoon in front of him.

He hurried down to the raft, drawn up on the pink sand beach and pawed in the bottom of it. In a moment he was back, with the line and wire leader swinging in his hand. For a long moment he stood, looking down at the little mound of sand. "Mac," he said aloud, with his voice cracking just a little, "it's just an idea, see? But sometimes when a guy's in bad trouble, his ideas gotta work." He shifted his feet and looked down. "You been with me on the Keys back home when we hauled in more than one of those big devils. You know they hit anything that moves, but they only.

swallow something they want to eat. And Mac, I gotta make him swallow."

For another long moment he stood in misery. Then he knelt awkardly and ran his tongue over his cracked, sunburned lips. "Mac," he said softly, "me, I don't mind. I been here. I tried and I understand. But with Gil it's gonna be hard. He ain't gonna understand, and you liked Gil as well as you liked me. Let's say you're doin' it for him, Mac. It's gonna break my heart, but I know if you were here and could talk for yourself, this would be the way you'd want it."

He took the whiskey bottle out of the sand and smashed it over a rock. Then he took the rock and beat the glass again with quick, nervous blows. When he finished, he had a small pile of jagged, needle like splinters, carefully put aside. He got down beside the grave again, and muttered huskily, "It'll work, Mac. I wouldn't do this to you if I thought it wouldn't. I promise you you'll get that bastard just like he got you." The sudden tears blinded him as he showed his hands down into the warm, loose sand and began to open the little mound.

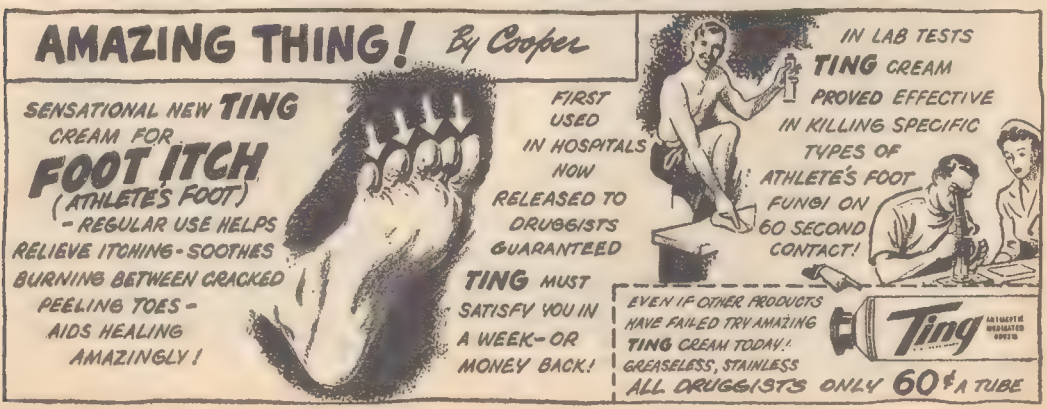
An hour later, Sanders stepped out along the reef again. The line was coiled again on his left arm, and the bait swung from a short length in his right hand. Purposely, he kept his eyes averted from it. He fought to drive out of his mind, his work with jacknife, wire, glass splinters—and MacTavish. He swallowed the lump in his throat, and slowly wound up for his first cast. The heavy bait soared out, splashed, sank, and came back to his feet. He moved along through the water filled holes in the coral, and tried again. Each time, as he jigged the bait back to his feet, he muttered huskily, "Get him, Mac!" And his eyes filled up again.

The 'cuda came on his tenth cast. He came on the top, skimming out from the reef on a sharply curving tangent. The man began a silent cursing as he watched him come. The short dorsal flicked the glassy surface in a thin pencil line that made a fifty-yard cut in the flick of an eye. He took the bait on his first run. There was just a single, sharp tug. Sanders let the line strip off his arm, and opened his left hand. He watched the braided end splash into the water, and whip down out of sight. For a moment he stood there, watching the ripples smooth away. Then, the semblance of a grin touched the cracked lips. "Digest that, you—"

It was noon the next day, when he pulled the raft along the heading of the reef, and started to walk the beach of the lagoon. His eyes searched out ahead along the gentle curve of sand, and presently a grin came out on his face, and he started to run. The splinters had got in their work. The long white belly of the dead 'cuda gleamed wetly as it bobbed gently against the beach in the slight swell. Sanders stood over the long length of it a moment. Then he drove his foot savagely into the silver spotted side, and turned away.

Back at the little mound of sand, where the barbed boathook had replaced the shattered bottle, he knelt and gently smoothed the Scotty's grave. "I kept my promise, Mac." he told MacTavish. "He's all yours!"

The man got up then and walked down to the raft. He waded with it into the lagoon—alone, but no longer afraid.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By
ROLAND WILD

based on an
interview with

Kouprian
Chanoff

●

Fact

The mound that might have been a contour of the earth rose screaming before me!

One Thousand Camp-Fires to FREEDOM

Kouprian Chanoff is the young leader of the 19 survivors of a party of White Russians who arrived in the U. S. A. in March after a 13,000 mile journey from the Interior of China.

They had left their village, in the Altai Mountains of China near the Soviet border, in 1947. They then numbered 115. Their route, without maps, was one of haphazard flight from the bands of red Chinese who always menaced them.

They were fleeing from the menace of red domination over a vast territory. Their enemies were communists officered by Russians from Moscow.

Their route, mostly traversed on foot, lay from near Urumchi, the nearest big city, across the Gobi Desert to the mountains of Tibet, thence to Calcutta, India, and by plane to Bremerhaven, Germany, by ship to New York.

THE officer kicked his horse into our village at the head of a guard of well-armed, well-disciplined ruffians from the hills of Turkestan. Outside the village, we saw the sentries had been posted, their long guns resting easily across their arms. The officer checked his horse and looked around the neat, well-built huts and carefully-tended fields of Chinkure, our home.

"Seize that man!" he growled in Russian. "I'll talk to him."

My uncle, one of the five hundred families that formed our community of exiles, was dragged before him.

"Name? How many cattle? Last year's crop?"

My uncle looked up at him without fear, and answered.

"You lie!" said the officer. "Take him away!"

It was the last my uncle saw of our village in the mountains. They questioned him again. Then they struck him to the ground, bound him hand and foot, and forced him to a kneeling position, his head down.

"Talk!" they said. "The truth!"

He would not talk.

"Look," they said. "Look on the hills for the last time!"

Then they forced his head lower and lit the torch, holding it under his eyes.

It was that night, October 7, 1947, we decided to leave our home forever.

We were to live on the spur of the moment for four years, five months, and four days.

We did not know, until we met silently by the river, how many we would be, who had made the decision and who had stayed. I said a brief good-by to my mother and my two sisters. My younger brother, Peter, came with me. I said I would be back soon —back to liberate the village.

That was the sudden, undramatic beginning of our flight to freedom. I found 113 men, a woman and her daughter.

OUR village, Chinkure, in the Altai Mountains, was a collection of five hundred sturdy log houses. My father, who died when I was two, had been a refugee himself, and you can say that we had all been refugees for thirty years. We were Greek Orthodox, strong in our faith, and our church was the center of village life to all of us.

We had never regretted the decision of our parents to flee from Russia and journey to this bleak corner of the world, a hundred miles from the Russian border and close to the Chinese and Mongolian frontiers. We were prosperous and hard working and self-contained. The climate was tough, forty below in winter, but we grew potatoes and tomatoes and grain, and we were good traders.

I was practically born on a horse. I could shoot well and was good with my hands. We could make our own sheepskin coats and mend the fine high boots of Russians. In the viggade school, I had learned something of the world, and had a good mental picture of the world war; but the confused, never-ending battle for China was closer to us.

I was nineteen years old. For two years I had been a fighting man. We based our hopes on receiving arms from Chiang Kai-Shek, and it was a big day when we had a shipment of rifles and ammunition. That night, we checked the arms we had between us. Every man had a rifle, usually an old Mauser, and many had revolvers as well. There were three machineguns, Belgian, Czech and Russian, old but good. There was a tremendous variety of cutlasses, short knives worn at the waist, and long curved Chinese blades. We were heavily bearded, portly in our padded sheepskin coats, rakish in our astrakhan hats. We had a leader, Burygin, a respected man in the village and a practical man in strategy.

Burygin was in a difficulty with the presence of the woman and child. Grigori Sharipov had never thought twice of bringing his wife Maria and eleven-year-old Tatania, and with them was Maria's father Fedossei Karpov, an old man who was sick.

But Maria, perhaps seeing our consternation, spoke up at once. "I can ride like a man!" she told us. "Yes, and I can shoot as well as some of you! Tatania can ride as well as any of us, and soon she, too, will shoot like a man!"

Maria Sharipov was remembering her own youth. She had been the same age as Tatania, thirty years before, when her parents had fled with her from south-east Russia, in the wake of the revolution. She, more than any of us, had always been a refugee.

Burygin told us, "Our only chance is to join with anti-Red Chinese who will keep us supplied with ammunition. We must keep moving until we find a band that will welcome us."

It was with this vague idea that we set off. But shortly we were given a foretaste of our life to come. We found ourselves cut off from the south. The north, we knew, was dangerous. Our only escape route was across the river.

WE KICKED our horses into the strong stream. One machinegun covered our crossing, while we swam by the horses' heads, the rifles and machineguns lashed to

their backs. The enemy, it seemed, didn't want to risk a pitched battle, not knowing how strong we might be, and kept his distance. But we rode all that night, knowing they were close behind us, and the next day. Then, suddenly, they left off pursuit. We knew, then, that we would always be on the run. We were nomads like the tribes of the desert.

Burygin put me in charge of the Belgian machinegun and the horse-lines at night. I became an expert machine-gunner, carrying the weapon on my horse and maintaining it. Night after night, after a long day in the saddle, I kept a lonely vigil, fighting sleep and the drowsiness that came from the camp-fire.

How many camp-fires, in desert and on ice, in snow and the bitter wind of the Gobi —in mountain passes? The hobbled horses moved restlessly, and at times I awoke, startled, to imagine figures moving out in the darkness.

The darkness was no friend to us. Around me, my people slept, and we were vulnerable to a raid, a sudden attack. I crept away from the glare of the fire to the other mounted machinegun. Gradually my eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom. There, almost invisible, was a hummock on the ground that could be a man. Another, back of it, and another. Faintly I could hear the jingle of a bridle far out in the night. This was no imagination—they were closing in on us.

I aimed carefully and the machinegun broke the stillness of the night. The belt ripped through the old gun and I sprayed the ground and the far distance with bursts. The horses reared against their tethers and the camp awoke from exhausted sleep.

The mound that might have been a contour of the earth rose screaming before me, a wild Mongolian son of the mountains with a curved sword in one hand, the other arm limp and bloody. I hardly troubled to put an eye to the sights. The next burst blew him into silence.

With hardly a word from our leader, still drugged with sleep, we saddled up and rode away. It was like that for thirty days before we found the first sanctuary. We were on the run, without purpose, without plan. How many camp-fires to freedom?

In Baityk, near the border of Mongolia, we rested, among people well supplied with arms and well able to resist communist attacks. We saw to our horses, fed and rested them, and mended clothes already falling into ruin. We even traded with the Chinese Mongols, taking their sheepskins and making coats and shirts in the old Russian manner. Our men were good with the needle, and we knew how to cure the skins and fit them. But we were not here merely to become traders and tailors—we talked always of the battle against the communists, and gradually a plan formed in our minds.

One name had always rung through my mind as a boy. It was a name that was a challenge, a name with a ring of hope. If I had a Robin Hood, it was Usman Batur, the fabulous Kazakh chief and warrior who was said to have around him an army of three thousand men, heavily armed and skilled at the guerilla warfare of the tribes; the warfare of swift raid and counter-stroke, then the flight and tireless march through the night.

We would join Usman Batur. We would link our hundred-odd strong men with his thousands. We rode south, refreshed by the rest and filled with hope.

USMAN BATUR was all that a boy's imagination could desire. He was well over six feet, with an imposing black beard. His huge frame seemed to swell under the padded Chinese uniform. His black astrakhan hat was pushed to the back of his head, worn with a swashbuckling air. He received us in his *iurta,* the skin-and-wool hut with a hole in the roof that is the household of the Chinese interior. He had a noble reputation and a sense of humor. He could neither read nor write, but he had brains, and was a veteran of a thousand skirmishes with the enemy. His name was authority, and he was our man.

His army was composed mainly of Chinese Mongolians, swift in warfare and tireless on their camels. They had plenty of machineguns and ammunition, and gave us two more guns for our armory. They were thirsting for battle against the Reds, anxious even for a pitched battle.

But that good luck which had been with us, now deserted both ourselves and our new ally. Usman Batur, deserting for once his policy of hit-and-run tactics, listened to

bad advice when he consented to a stand-up fight against an army greater than his three thousand men and better armed.

With him were a handful of our men. Only five returned from the massacre.

Usman's loosely-disciplined three thousand were strung out in a series of camps, the outriders and sentries posted on the low-lying hills. Usman himself lived in his tent in the center of the huge, untidy conglomeration of men, cattle, horses and some families. The scene was one of medieval primitiveness. Usman's personality had affected every man, and his confidence seeped through the ranks of as aggressive an army of ragtag and bobtail cut-throats as ever assembled.

They were arrogant from recent successes and the frequent additions to their forces. They could not imagine an army better equipped or more experienced. Every man had a full cartridge belt, every man was well-mounted and practiced in the science of warfare, of ambush and raid and counter-raid. Plunder had enriched them. They believed themselves invincible.

The way the few survivors told it, the battle began when a score of horsemen galloped out to wipe out a posse of Reds, as they often had before, taking their guns and their horses and leaving their bones to rot where they lay. The horsemen penetrated into a ravine, riding ahead without thought of unprotected flanks and rear.

Suddenly, they were scorched and plunged into confusion by a withering hail of bullets. The fire came from two sides and the rear, from machineguns and small arms. They broke and scattered, tried to reform and charge an unseen enemy. Then there was silence.

Usman Batur himself, seeing the fatal errors of his commanders, gathered around him the elite corps of his body guard. He knew, now, that the fight was lost against the Reds of the Chinese interior. His had been the largest force, the sole hope of tens of thousands like us. He fought now for his life.

Of all that impressive army, Usman Batur was left with twenty-five followers. The rest lay rotting in the blood-soaked ravines. Usman Batur, a ragged and exhausted refugee himself, had nothing more than a sheepskin coat on his back, a cutlass at his waist, and a rifle.

In one week our confidence had evaporated, our force was depleted, and we were nomads again. We believed that all China was lost. We gave up hope of ever rescuing our village in the Altai Mountains.

Before us stretched the Gobi Desert.

WE KILLED sheep, cut out their bellies, and fashioned crude water bags. We traded our horses for camels, and made puggarees, like the turbans of India, so that we could hold the ends in our teeth and cover our faces from the wind and the sand. Lastly we killed a horse and cooked the meat to suck on through days of endless traveling.

Grigori Sharipov and two men resolved on a desperate plan for the safety of his wife and daughter and the old man. They would, when attacked, ride off to draw away pursuers from the main party. A handful of Usman's men, remaining with us, offered to act as outriders. We set off across the grim, malignant Gobi, the "Black Desert" that is strewn with the bones of camels. We would join another chieftain, Vovora, the Mongol, who might succeed where Usman Batur had so tragically failed.

The wind cut and burned the flesh. Old Karpov, gaunt and weak, slumped from his camel and had to be tied to the saddle. Tatania, her black eyes pleading, cried in the night for bread and pancakes, and we realised that for nearly two years she had existed on meat alone.

We could not speak against the vicious whip of the wind in our faces, choking and blinding us. From time to time the outriders loped towards us, urging more speed, and we thrashed the weary camels to more speed. The foul water in the sheep stomachs was only enough to wet our throats. Days merged into weary nights. I knew nothing but the wind, the dream of a cup of water, the stutter of the machinegun, and the crying of the child.

The Reds were plaguing and harrying us. I shall never know how many killed in those short, sharp skirmishes. At night they came to thieve, thinking we would perish without our foundering camels, and the camel thief of the Gobi is wily and daring. The Reds estimated that they did not have to risk an attack on us. They were waiting for the Gobi, whose winds are

chilled on the tundras of the Far North, to destroy us.

But on the fourth, or the fifth, or the sixth day we were across the Gobi. Now there were little more than a hundred of us, weak and tattered skeletons, riddled with lice. Karpov was dying, and we know now it was cancer. Burygin was sick and in pain, and we appointed a new leader, Biloff, a giant of a man who had the respect of all of us.

In our maps of the world at school, and in our youthful conception of geography, there was always one great barrier that seemed the end of our world. The Himalayas were the far-off mountains that hid the lush richness of India. They were countless miles away, by crow's flight better than a thousand miles from where we had started our journey. But we had been two years in fruitless and frustrated wandering.

Tatania, the girl who should have been playing with young companions, was a hardened campaigner, who could shoot but could not read, used only to the restless flight, the emergencies of men in battle, the thongs that tied her to camel-back when she dropped with weariness, the panic of a horse to which she clung with weary legs, starvation and cold. We had lost all hopes of ever returning to our people, all hope of fighting and winning. We had no maps, but we made our resolution.

We would go to India.

Now I faced another great decision. I was twenty-two, and they made me leader. Burygin was weak and we feared for his life. Biloff, the second leader, knew that I spoke Tibetan, was an expert with the machinegun, and had a sense for the guerilla tactics that characterized our fighting.

But there was more to it than that. I had, it seemed, gained a sense of leadership over the pathetic remainder of our force. I was strong and felt that I was almost tireless. I had been the night guard for many months. The men were inclined to turn to me for my opinion of strategy, and I was proud.

But there has seldom been a leader of such a forlorn, bedraggled, weakening army. We were the ghosts of the villagers who had carved out a living for ourselves in the rigorous winters and blazing summers. I was captain of a rag-tag company in which you could hardly distinguish the woman and young girl. But we had hope, as we left the burning plains and set our faces to the snows of the Himalayas.

BREATH came with agony, and our hearts pounded as we slowly marched into the white wilderness. The camels faltered and died. We traded guns for a yak, and Maria Sharipov and Tatania rode it as we slowly penetrated into what we hoped would be a free world. At night, we burrowed under the snow for relief from the bitter wind.

I had only one thing in mind now. I thought I could lead the survivors into India and freedom. Another wild hope possessed me—if we reached India, we might reach Europe and the United States.

Burygin was failing. In spite of the dangers we must go into Lhasa to get medical aid. We had traveled four hundred miles in Tibet, and had another three hundred to go. Desperately, we began trading. A hundred rupees for a rifle, for food. There was nothing else to sell. The Tibetans, seeing our plight, helped when they could, but our need was to make for Lhasa and get Burygin into a hospital. In Lhasa, too, I hoped to make contact with the Western world.

The dream had grown stronger in my mind that some land in the Western world, some land of freedom, would accept us. My brother and I were young. All of us were good workers, good farmers and husbandmen. We might speak an old-fashioned kind of Russian, but we could learn a new language.

The world was upside down, and we were starving vagrants in one small corner of it. We had been living close to the elements for so long that we had forgotten the existence of cities, wealth, comfort and rest. These were the Himalayas I had seen on the school maps, but in four years of aimless and footsore wandering, we were unimpressed with the magnitude of our achievement. It had been one step after another for these four years. We could not know, there in the Tibetan passes, that we would soon leap over the world in giant strides. . . .

The revolution that had taken place in

(Continued on page 110)

LIVE FREIGHT

By

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

When Sidney, the darling of the stock shows, disputed the lordship of the North woods—the battle was one the wilderness never forgot!

Sidney knocked him over again—and then he joined the cows. . . .

THE Alaska-Asiatic Airways was a one-plane company operating on a badly worn shoestring. A serious mishap, or bad publicity could put it out of business. The president, flying the company's sole equipment, glanced at the vice-president and co-pilot and shrugged his shoulders, a gesture indicating, *This could be it.* . . . They had lost the starboard engine at ten thousand feet and were losing altitude in one of Alaska's famed ice fogs. They carried live freight.

The fog from seven thousand feet down was full of wind-swept peaks, glaciers with yawning crevasses, deep canyons and lonely valleys. It was an ideal area for a plane to vanish without a trace. President Joe Grant and Vice-President Andy Ballard knew where they were, and cross bearings from the CAA stations at Kodiak and Anchorage confirmed their judgment.

They were young men in their late twenties who had their basic training in bush pilot flying, then qualified as instrument pilots with plenty to spare. There are none better equipped to meet the varied flying conditions of Alaska and the Arctic. They were engaged to nice girls and hoped to

run their charter service into a non-scheduled airline with several planes. After that, if democracy worked the way they hoped it would, they would operate a scheduled airline with four-engined equipment from Seattle to the Orient.

"What do you think, Andy?" Joe asked. He had a doll face and sometimes when timid women saw him smiling from the pilot's seat, they refused to fly. Joe had threatened to grow a spade beard on his rose-petal cheeks.

"The reason you're president," Andy answered, "is because you're a cut above me in flying skill and judgment. What you do is good enough for me."

Joe grinned and to prove that he meant it, he lit a cigarette and relaxed. The prop showered the plane with ice. The wing tips disappeared in the fog.

Joe Grant's procedure under present conditions had been long planned and had been carried out successfully on two other occasions. First you hunted for a hole in the clouds. In the meantime you hoped to avoid the clouds full of rocks. Then you hunted a spot to set her down. If possible you landed in an area permitting repairs and a take-off. If not, you landed where extensive work with axe and shovel would create an improvised strip. If this proved impossible, you said, the hell with it, and hoped you could walk away from the wreck.

Of course if you had passengers, you put their life and limbs above all else. On this trip Joe and Andy had a single passenger—Sidney. Sidney was a blue ribbon bull being flown to Matanuska Valley to improve the dairy herds. He weighed over a ton, was built like a brick house, hated planes and getting him aboard was a hair-raising job.

In his quest for blue ribbons, Sidney had flown many times, but each loading aroused his ire. As soon as the plane was aloft Sidney became his normal sweet self. He loved fairs and people. If a child offered Sidney a clover leaf, he licked it gently from the timidly extended fingers and his expression seemed to say, *Be kind to animals, my little child, and animals will be kind to you.* But with his gentleness Sidney had the confidence and dignity of a politician elected to five successive terms to the United States Senate.

With the ice rattling against the plane, Sidney did nothing more than glance at the nearest window, and resume chewing his cud and reflecting on the fact that he had never had it better. In time the plane would land; he would be taken to a nice warm barn and be fed mash, grain and hay. He wouldn't even have to lick his own coat. Men would groom him until he was glossy.

If Sidney had only known the perils of Alaska flying he might have bellowed and pawed. But Sidney didn't know and sound pilot practice keeps passengers in ignorance of peril. So often peril passes.

THE plane banked suddenly, and Sidney was thrown violently against the crate. But he remained calm. *Must have encountered a bit of turbulent air,* Sidney thought. He didn't see the sheer wall the plane had narrowly missed. He was breathing easier, but didn't realize it was because of the lower altitude. Sidney was a sea-level bull.

Andy came back and said, "Sidney, traveling is broadening. You don't know it, but your breadth is due for an increase—if you survive." He thought. *If you're hurt I'll put you out of your misery. Gosh! Imagine the wolves and ravens feeding on blue ribbon bull.*

Sidney looked benign. He liked this man who was putting additional ropes onto the crate. Sidney never dreamed Joe had said, "Andy, put a few more lashings on the crate. If it's a crash landing, I don't want a ton of bull pushing me through the windshield."

Andy finished his job and reported. "You'd better do what you can for yourself," Joe advised. "No need of two of us being up here." Which was another way of saying, *If you aren't hurt, maybe you can get me out in time.*

Andy piled sleeping bags back of the crate, added anything soft he could find in the cargo, then waited. He saw a cliff whizz past, and heard birch tops slapping the plane's landing gear. He wondered whether Sidney would go through the top, or crash the bulkhead. Then he heard rubber crying out in pain, and all hell seemed to be breaking loose. The plane pitched and tossed, then stopped with wings mowing down young birches.

Andy opened the door and looked out.

Joe had set her down in a moose pasture. The frosty ground had stood up and by a miracle, plus good piloting, the wheels were intact. But it would take a lot of work before they could take off. Joe came out and slowly checked the landing gear and wings.

"Good thing they build 'em well," he said. "We're alive. But it's going to be tough on Sidney. He'll have to look after himself. And he isn't prepared."

"Neither were the thousands who packed over Chilkoot Pass in 'ninety-eight," Andy said, "but when the chips were down, they measured up. Blood will tell."

They went to work with axe and saw, improvised a ramp, and got Sidney out of the plane. Sidney trembled, as if with a chill. He looked around for a man with steaming hot food. The only steam he saw was the vapor from the air they exhaled. Sidney trembled again.

"He's cold," Andy said, "but he won't be lonesome. Plenty of wild life in this valley. You should have heard the racket in the birches after we landed—moose, bear and no telling what else, hightailing it for safe places."

"But will Sidney understand wild life, and will wild life understand Sidney?" Joe asked. "After all, at the stock shows, what does a bull meet, but people, other bulls, cows, goats, sheep, poultry and pigs? In these parts there are no people—the bulls and cows are moose, the goats and sheep high up. The poultry is, or are, ptarmigan, camp robbers and ravens. Nothing like a raven to add to a gloomy day. And how the hell will we load him aboard again if—"

They checked the area, made improvements in the field, got themselves a meal, slept in the plane, inflated a rubber raft and disappeared down a nearby stream. Sidney was alone! He looked around for a barn and people. No voice broke the silence, unless it was the raven's harsh note. They were gathering in numbers, as if expecting Sidney would give up the ghost and die. Sidney stood the silence as long as he could, then he bellowed. He got an answer. Sidney didn't know it was an echo. He thought it was another bull. He pushed his way through the birches toward the sound and stopped at a cliff. He bellowed again. There was no answer. *Hell,* Sidney thought, *where'd that guy go to?*

HE SNIFFED the ground for food—mostly frost-killed grass. He didn't like what he found. He bellowed. He felt lonesome and sorry for himself. There were mountains, covered with snow, on all sides, and the winds were raw. Sidney kept right on looking for a barn.

Sidney broke through the birch thicket and his nostrils picked up an animal scent. It was different from any he had known, but very strong. He moved toward it and presently looked onto a moose pasture. A bull and half dozen cow moose were browsing a hundred yards away.

My word, Sidney thought, *what manner of cattle are these—eating trees instead of grass? And look at the horns on the bull. Heck of a load to pack around! And, gad, look at his women! What horrible profiles! Look at their noses. And imagine kissing those puffed-up lips? No wonder the bull is down-hearted.*

Sidney felt the bull needed understanding companionship. He didn't know it was the season of the love moon for moose, and that the bull had fought nearly two weeks to keep raiding bulls from the herd. He was red-eyed and willing to fight anything.

The bull saw Sidney. He pawed the ground, then charged. The ravens watched with interest, knowing from experience that when bulls meet one often dies. Sidney never had a chance to explain that there were some pretty keen numbers among the stock exhibit cows. Antlers and a hard head struck Sidney and rolled him over. The air was knocked from his lungs in a gusty bellow. Sidney was irked for the first time in his life. *What the dam' hell?* he thought.

Sidney struggled to his feet in time to be knocked down again. Sidney was really mad for the first time in his life. *Why damn your hide,* he thought.

He lowered his head and the air was filled with stars. The bull was stunned by Sidney's hard head. He spread his legs wide to keep from falling over and hate blazed from his red eyes. Sidney walked off a few yards, turned and bellowed. He thought, *I came in peace to tell you where you could find better-looking women, and you lit into me. Okay, Buster, if that's the way you want it.* Sidney charged. His head almost caved in the bull's ribs. The

bull got up, feeling sick, and stood there, willing to fight, but lacking the strength.

Sidney knocked him over again, then he joined the cows. *Front legs longer than the rear ones, and they eat leaves and twigs,* Sidney thought. *I realize how lucky I am to be made the way I was.*

Sidney made no passes at the cows, which seemed to surprise them. He didn't herd them, or throw his weight around. He just felt lonely and wanted companionship.

Horrible-looking women, he thought. *But any old port in a storm as the sailors say. . . .*

He tried eating twigs and leaves, but it was no good. The cows moved on to a lake and waded in. Sidney followed, but turned around. *Cold enough to freeze a brass monkey,* he thought. The cows put their heads under the water, and came up with lily pads and stems, which they ate with relish.

The pangs of hunger drove Sidney into the water. He shook from the shock, then ducked his head under. He raised it instantly, almost choking to death. Perhaps it was because he closed his eyes, or had the wrong kind of lips, but Sidney hadn't found a thing on the bottom. He galloped around the lake to get warm, then began brooding.

A barn! A barn! he thought. *My kingdom for a barn.*

Sidney pulled himself together with an effort, and settled down to eating the frost-killed grass. The short day ended, and the love moon came out. There were stirrings in the thickets, and sharp cries as creature preyed on creature.

Sidney joined the cows for warmth, but whenever he crowded in between them they moved away. He heard the bull bellow and anger surged through him. *So you want more of the same, Buster,* he thought. *Okay, I'm cold, my meal isn't setting well, and I'm not the easy-going guy the stock shows knew. Besides, the cows sneer at my little horns.*

Muttering under his breath Sidney walked to the scene of his first victory on the field of honor. The bull was on his feet, and a ring of wolves had surrounded him. Sensing he was battered and tired the pack was moving in for the kill.

Long-slumbering instincts welled up in Sidney. Perhaps the eerie, moonlit scene awakened them. Possibly the fight with the bull moose was the initial awakening. Sidney charged at the ring and the wolves scattered. Two moved in on him. One attacked from the rear, hoping to sever the hamstring of his left leg and bring him down. The other launched an attack at Sidney's throat.

Perhaps the wolf had always taken a moose's great spread of antlers into consideration when he attacked, instinctively knowing that once inside of their range of defense he was safe. As he came in, Sidney tossed his head angrily. One short, sharp horn stabbed deep into the wolf. Sidney tossed the dying animal over his head, and whirled to finish him. He caught the second wolf with a glancing blow that sent him away thoroughly beaten.

After that Sidney forgot dignity. He was hungry, angry and the primitive urge rode him with spurs. Presently he stood beside the bull moose. There were four dead wolves on the ground and the others had slunk off to lick their wounds. There was blood on Sidney's horns and the bull's antlers. In the world of humans this might have been the beginning of a beautiful friendship, but Sidney sensed otherwise. The bull was almost ready to fight again. Sidney thought, *The hell with you, and you know what you can do with your women, too—eating tree branches and things on the lake bottom.*

SIDNEY wandered off, looking for a barn, or man. He went back to the plane, attracted by the man-scent, but it was cold and deserted. But the silvery wings looked pretty in the moonlight. He left the valley and worked his way along a ridge, knee deep in snow. He thought he saw a bunch of grass and sniffed. There was an explosion of feathers against Sidney's nose, and a ptarmigan flew through the night. Sidney moved down to the lower country again and continued his search for a barn. He finally gave up in disgust and bedded down in a thicket.

A sick sun awakened him. Battling and unusual exercise had stiffened his muscles. *Ain't as young as I used to be,* he thought. Instinctively he protested as he got to his feet, and as instinctively he looked around.

for someone bringing hot mash. He heard the moose in the next thicket, but scorned them. He ate the frost-killed grass and felt his stomach again objecting to such treatment.

All day Sidney drifted across the valley, while the ravens moved from tree to tree, waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened until late that afternoon. Sidney found a cave and his nostrils picked up the scent of hair and warmth. The scent was vaguely familiar, and he remembered the performing bear that wrestled with a man at stock shows and county fairs. Sidney regarded the bear as a bit on the silly side, but harmless enough. *At least bears don't have profiles such as I saw on the moose's women,* he thought. He thrust his head into the cave and sniffed.

The bear was hibernating, but sleep vanished when he saw Sidney's head and short horns. He had seen nothing like them before. With a roar of mixed fear and rage, the bear jumped up. Sidney took a powder. He hit the nearest thicket and plowed through it. A caribou burst from the thicket ahead of Sidney and showed him what speed in an emergency really could be.

It looks as if a guy needed horns, and a lot of 'em, to get by in this country, Sidney thought.

Sidney looked over his shoulder and realized the wrestling bears were nothing like this one. This fellow was brown. Sidney turned his head and saw the river for the first time. It was dead ahead. He didn't hesitate. He leaped over the bank, dropped fifteen feet and disappeared into a pool rimmed with ice.

The bear, red tongue hanging out, leered down. Then as Sidney drifted with the current, the bear—nice and warm in a thick fur coat—followed. Sidney grounded on a gravel bar. He shook the water from his hide.

He felt the odds against him in this country were too great and that he would perish miserably, and that the ravens, who were always watching him, realized this. To get by, a guy needed lips like a cow moose—heaven forbid—and a warm coat. And more horns. Sidney walked throughout the night. His coat dried from the heat of his body—a slow, devilish process.

At dawn it started snowing. Sidney retreated into a thicket and waited. Finally he bedded down. The snow covered him with a blanket. The day passed, then two more before the snow stopped and the sun came out. An artist would have called the land beautiful. Where the trees were not burdened with snow, their leaves sparkled. The air was very blue, the sun brilliant and the snow-capped peaks notched the sky on all sides. Sidney was hungry. *And not a damned thing to eat,* he thought. He moved heavily, belly-deep, through the snow and at times he floundered.

He saw the moose filling their stomachs with leaves and branches. Sidney went on, searching for frost-killed grass. He found a couple of nibbles of the hated stuff where the wind had blown the snow from the ground. Sidney ate the grass right down to the roots. He even got roots and a little gravel.

A mile from the moose he saw the caribou. Sidney liked the caribou women much better. They had nice lips and a much better profile. The caribou had brushed away the snow where the fall had been light and were eating moss and lichens. Sidney joined them and the bulls offered no objection. He stuffed himself with moss and lichens. The stuff was filling, if not fattening. Sidney belched constantly without excusing himself, but the caribou didn't seem to mind. Sidney realized he was losing weight, but he also noticed the ravens had quit hanging around.

Sidney was with the caribou when the plane passed overhead. The plane was equipped with skis and the pilot was shooting wolves for the bounty. He saw Sidney, shook his head, swore he would stop drinking, then landed.

"Well, I hope to kiss a pig," he said, "it *is* a bull."

Sidney hurried right over, and the pilot, mistaking his intentions ran to the plane and took off. Sidney looked sad and bellowed, thinking, *He might know where I could find a barn. I haven't been warm in days.*

WHEN the pelt hunter returned a week later, he had a passenger aboard. Joe Grant peered down and said, "That's Sidney, sure enough. But he's ten miles from the plane, Mike."

(Continued on page 108)

J Dreany

JUNGLE BOOM

By WILLARD PRICE

From the author's forthcoming book, "The Amazing Amazon," which will be published in the fall.

SUDDEN millionaires. Grand opera in the jungle. Champagne at fifty dollars a bottle. Gowns from Paris. Sculpture from Rome. Painted ladies and stolen concubines. Men burned alive. Children's brains dashed out. Starvation, and death, a fortune in jewels and a basket of fingers and ears.

Such was the romance of rubber.

Saturnalia of lust, greed, beauty, and blood, the rubber boom of 1900-12 was an orgy the like of which had not happened since Nero. It happened because Amazonia was a land beyond the law. It was faintly like the Californian frontier during the gold rush. But the gold rush was an orderly procedure, as proper as a prayer meeting compared to the rubber rush.

The gold seekers were side by side, a thousand in a single creek bed, and held each other in check. The rubber seeker got himself a solitary hole in the jungle and hung up his conscience before he crawled in.

The gold man had only competitors, men as independent and strong as he was. They could not be imposed upon. The rubber man had Indian slaves whose arrows were no match for his firearms and who could be bullied, beaten, beheaded, with impunity.

The gold rush brought out a little of the worst in man but much of the best. The rubber rush turned good men into bad ones and bad ones into devils.

It began with a pair of shoes.

A pair of rubber shoes went to Boston in 1820. They created a sensation. Back came an order for five hundred pairs.

The Indian's method of manufacture was simple. He coated his own foot with rubber latex. When it had dried he added another layer. He kept this up until the shoe was about a quarter of an inch thick. When he had enough pairs to make the trip worth while, he took them in to the nearest trading post whence they were shipped abroad.

Rubber found dozens of other uses. It was made into water buckets, elastic garters, mackintoshes, rubber soles, tobacco pouches, waterproof sheets, air pillows. One experimenter found that it could be used to rub out pencil marks—in fact that was how it came by the name of rubber. It made hard-rubber tires for the first bicycles. It was the answer to the need for an air-filled tire on those same bicycles.

But it was the horseless carriage that really brought in the reign of rubber. And it all had to come from the Amazon. There alone could the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis,* be found in large numbers.

It was about 1900 that the automobile age ushered in the great boom. A rubber-hungry world sent promoters to the frontier village of Manaos, where they made unheard-of offers for latex.

The Indians tapped the trees, smoked the latex, and brought it to town in canoes. Ocean freighters came up the Amazon to get it. To accommodate them, a forty-million-dollar system of docks was installed at Manaos.

But the Indians did not satisfy the demand. They did not stick at the job. After their few simple needs were filled, they quit work. They did not seem to appreciate how important all this was to the rubber promoters of Manaos. They perversely preferred to live their own lives.

Of course this could not be tolerated. The aggrieved promoters considered the problem. The world needed rubber and it was outrageous that a pack of lazy Indians should stand in the way of progress. If they would not work of their own free will, they must be coerced—for their own good, of course.

Taskmasters went out into the jungle and set up head-quarters near good stands of rubber. Then they called in the Indians, and poor Brazilian caboclos, also, if there happened to be any in the region, for a talk. It was a very friendly talk. The newcomer gave every man some fishhooks, mirrors, beads, cotton cloth, and perhaps even a bottle of whisky. All that was asked in return was that the men should collect a little rubber to pay for these articles.

Their hearts filled with gratitude for such largesse, the men went to work. They worked a day, two days, three days, but when they asked if they had worked off their debt they were told, "Not yet."

In the meantime the patron had set up a store. It was filled with the most enticing trade goods. And the miracle was that everything was free. That is, you didn't have to pay for anything—you simply took it and it was checked on your account. It merely made your debt a little larger.

You were so busy now that you had no time to hunt or fish. But it didn't matter—you could get all the food you needed at the store. The prices tacked on all items in the store did not mean much to you—you had no way of knowing that they were five or ten times what they should have been. You did not even know that your debt was increasing to astronomical proportions; you never saw the books.

But when you asked the patron if you had done enough and could go home now he was indignant and ordered his bruisers to flog you for attempting to sneak out without paying your debt.

And they did flog you with a thong made of tough tapir hide. It cut so deeply into your flesh that the scars would remain the rest of your days.

And so rubber rolled out in a mighty black flood. The patrons on the field and the middlemen of Manaos piled up fantastic fortunes. Money flowed like champagne, and champagne like water. The new-rich lit their cigars with hundred-milreis notes.

MANAOS became one of the wealthiest cities per capita in the world. And the most expensive to live in. Its food, imported from Europe, sometimes literally cost its weight in gold.

But it was not merely imported items that were expensive. While slave labor in the jungle was as cheap as dirt because it was slave labor, independent labor in town had things all its own way. A boy wanted the equivalent of three dollars (U.S.) to carry a package three blocks. And of course you could not carry it yourself for fear of social ostracism. A boatman charged five dollars to row a passenger across the river. (Now the rate is ten cents.) A waitress was not surprised to receive a ten-dollar tip and frequently got fifty dollars, with a diamond thrown in.

Jewelers' windows specialized in diamonds, brought north from the rich diamond mines of Minas Gerais. Many fingers that rarely knew soap, knew diamonds well. Manaos became for a time the world's chief diamond market.

But why shouldn't everyone wear diamonds when a single canoe-load of rubber was worth $2500? The rubber barons built palaces with marbles from Italy and furnishings from France. Their wives imported linens from Lisbon or London and,

when the linens were soiled, sent them to Europe to be laundered! Families thought nothing of commuting back and forth between Paris and Manaos.

The children of this Babylon of the jungle played with toys of gold. When they grew to school age, they went to the great schools and universities of Europe for their education, institutions that many Europeans could not afford to attend. That is the reason why this remote jungle city has more European culture today than many a provincial town in Europe itself.

The riffraff of the world rolled in, tasted of the black flood, and immediately began calling themselves dukes and duchesses. You could find a countess in any back alley. It was a carnival of swagger and swank. Never was there such a strange mixture of bawdy abondon and prim culture. You could spend a night under a table without social censure. But you dared not appear in public without wearing a coat—and this on the equator where a woolen coat is a fundamental absurdity. On the other hand, the burlesque queens who wore nothing at all were in high esteem. But a female pick-up must wear an evening gown or she was *declassé*.

Painted ladies from Paris, Madrid and London came on every ship. Wealthy rubber merchants prómptly endowed them with jewelry worth thousands of dollars. Girls from Broadway came to teach dancing, and other arts.

The red-light district became internationally famous. It began as a district but spread until it covered the whole town. According to police records for 1911 sixty-four per cent of the residences of Manaos were disorderly houses. Enter any house in town, and you stood two chances out of three of meeting a daughter of joy. In the third case you would be politely told where you could find one. Probably next door.

The rich were not satisfied to be rich—they wanted to be aristocrats. Their wives came back from Europe smarting under the contempt of the continental for the raucous life of a frontier town. Manaos must become a city of culture, Paris of the New World.

And so the opera house was built—by men who would not have known an opera from a barroom ballad. But they did know how to spend money. Erected at a cost of $10,000,000, the Teatro do Amazonas was, and remains, the world's most costly opera house. Its cost was not due alone to the fact that money meant nothing to its builders, nor was it due only to its great size and magnificence—but chiefly to the unique circumstance that it was built four thousand miles away from the place where it was set up. It was pre-fabricated in England, taken to pieces and shipped across the Atlantic and a thousand miles up the Amazon, there to be rebuilt.

EUROPEAN opera troupes were invited to perform on the stage of the jungle theater. They refused. But when offered for one season what they would earn in five seasons at home, they reconsidered. World-renowned divas sang here. Pavlowa danced here. So did the famous *Corps de Ballet* from La Scala.

Of one opera troupe of eighteen, ten died of yellow fever. But more came, lured by fabulous fees. Some stayed to marry rubber barons and became the mistresses of mansions in which nothing was allowed unless it came from abroad. Close the shutters and you were in Europe.

The magnificence of the opera house was repeated in the mansions that rose not only in the city but far up the rivers on the rubber holdings of the patrons. Many of them remain, enduring monuments to vanity and folly.

One of them, dominating an island in the Uaupes River, is typical of many others. Tiles brought from Portugal wall the rooms from floor to ceiling. One room has rose tiles, another pale green, another pink, and so on, a different color for each room. Artists brought from France decorated the ceilings with naked figures, unanimously feminine. A grand piano was considered essential although it had to be brought a thousand miles upstream on a raft and nobody could play it. Tapestries came from Venice, plate glass mirrors from Brussels. The rooms were hung with elaborate glass chandeliers that would have been appropriate in a Versailles palace but were a bit odd in a milieu of monkeys and boa constrictors.

And all this burden of futile extravagance was carried on the back of the rubber worker or *seringueiro*—an interesting word derived from *seringa*, the Brazilian name

for the rubber tree because rubber was used to make syringes. The work of the seringueiro was to make the rounds daily of all the rubber trees in his part of the jungle, collecting the latex that had dripped into the tin cups.

The life at its best was anything but healthful and the mortality among *seringueiros* was staggering due to fevers, beriberi, tuberculosis, tainted stagnant water and bad food.

But the rubber worker was lucky if things were no worse than that. The patron was a petty king with all the rights of an absolute monarch and more often than not abused his authority. In his passion for more chandeliers, grand pianos and what not, he was not tolerant when the take of rubber fell short of his expectations.

It was not merely a case of a gentle reprimand or a light whipping. Men were flogged until the bones protruded; then they were thrown out, senseless, to be eaten by the dogs and vultures.

Atrocities worse than those of the Congo were practiced in Peruvian Amazonia along the Putumayo River. The Indians of this region were numerous and peaceable. Any who would not do what was demanded of them were freely killed as a warning to others. The rubber barons organized *correrrias* or slave raids in which bands of armed men descended upon Indian villages and took the men in chains to the rubber camp.

"*Son animales, señor—no son gentes.*" They are animals, *señor*—they are not people. That was the Peruvian attitude toward the Indian. To torture or mutilate him was no worse than picking a grasshopper apart. The tradition had begun with Pizarro and had continued with forced labor in the mines and branding on the face with hot irons under the viceroys of Peru.

Nor was the torture of the Indian done only for punishment. It was a diversion. It was fun.

Indians were placed in the stocks and used for target practice. Contests were held. The test of skill was the ability to take off the various appendages without actually killing the target. Differing counts on the score were allowed for an ear, a nose, a finger, a thumb, a toe.

Another jolly sport consisted in rubbing the skin of an Indian from head to foot with petroleum under the pretense that it was good to keep off mosquitoes—then setting him on fire.

One barbarous patron, Fonseca, had his own way of observing saints' days. On the *Sabado de Gloria* some friends came to see him.

"Look," he said, "this is how we celebrate the *Sabado de Gloria* here."

Picking up a revolver, he let fly at some of his Indians, killing one man instantly and hitting a fifteen-year-old girl. The girl, being disabled, was of no further use and one of Fonseca's henchmen finished her with a bullet.

The rubber was weighed on a crude scale. If it did not tip the the scale the Indian knew what was coming to him and he anticipated it by lying down on the ground and waiting for the whip. Occasionally, to vary the procedure, he might be taken to the river and held under until he became unconscious. Or he might be suspended by a chain around his feet so that he was just out of reach of the ground, and left there for two days. Or he might be hung by the neck with the feet scarcely touching the ground. This punishment was supposed to be the more effective if the children of the culprit were assembled and, one by one, swung by the feet and their brains dashed out in full view of their half-strangled father.

The rubber king, Aguero, prided himself on his sense of humor. Entering an Indian village with the intention of taking slaves, he found two Indian women ill of smallpox. They begged for medicine. He expressed his sympathy and assured them that he was just the man to help them.

"I have a medicine that will cure you completely."

And as they rejoiced he drew his machete and cut off their heads.

STORIES of these atrocities leaked out to Europe and North America—but it was impossible to believe them, Impossible until an investigating commission, appointed by the British government, reported that they were true. This investigation was conducted by Sir Roger Casement, British Consul General at Rio de Janeiro. Going to the Putumayo, he held hearings in which the testimony of rubber employees was

taken down verbatim. The following was a typical interview.

"And you say you saw Indians burned?"

"Yes."

"Burned alive?".

"Alive."

"How do you mean? Describe this."

"This Indian had not work *caucho*, he ran away and he kill a *muchacho*, a boy, and they cut off his two arms and his legs by the knee and they burn his body."

"And he still living?"

"Yes, he still living."

"Did they tie the body up and burn it so?"

"They didn't tie him up. They drag the body and they put plenty of wood and set fire to it, and throw the man on it."

"Are you sure he was still alive—not dead when they threw him on the fire?"

"Yes, he was alive. I'm sure of it. I see him move, open his eyes. He screamed out."

"Was he a young man?"

"A young man, about twenty-four years of age."

"What tribe—what family of Indians?"

"Well, I could not say. I did not know the people then, because I newly went there."

"Was Aurelio Rodriguez looking on all the time?"

"Yes—all the time."

"Giving directions?"

"Yes, sir."

"He told them to cut off the legs and the arms?"

"Yes."

"And then to put the man on the fire?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"I was standing up watching it."

"Had you a gun?"

"No—I didn't have no gun then. I was cooking that day."

"Did they burn the body to pieces?"

"Yes—everything burnt to ashes."

Casement's report was passed on to the United States government by British Ambassador James Bryce with this comment:

"It is no exaggeration to say that this information as to the methods employed in the collection of rubber surpasses in horror anything hitherto reported to the civilized world during the last century. Flogging, torturing, burning, starving to death, have been in this ill-fated region constantly and ruthlessly employed, while the brutal lust and piteous cruelty wantonly practiced on the women and children deepen, if possible, the horrors of the scene."

The British and American governments made representations to the government of Peru that if the atrocities were not stopped, the Casement report would be published. Peru denied the atrocities. After a delay of a year Great Britain published the document. It was also published by the United States as Document No. 1366 of the House of Representatives and may be found in the Library of Congress.

It was shown in Sir Roger Casement's report that for the twelve years 1900-1911 Putumayo output of four thousand tons of rubber cost thirty thousand lives. Figuring deaths indirectly due to the atrocities, the toll was even larger. At the beginning the Indian population of the region was about fifty thousand; it shrank to seven thousand.

Nor was the Putumayo unique. Much of what went on there was duplicated in neighboring regions of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil. British attention was especially focused upon the Putumayo only because in that territory great sums of British capital had been invested.

As for the Amazon valley taken as a whole, it was estimated that every ton of rubber cost two human lives.

THERE was a turn for the better immediately after the Casement Report. This was due, at least in part, to the collapse of the rubber boom. In the last months of 1912 while the report was on the press, Amazon rubber was still riding high. When it appeared in February, 1913, the industry was already tobogganing to disaster.

Rubber was flowing to the world from the Far East. In that year for the first time the production of southeast Asia (50,000 tons) exceeded that of the Amazon (37,000 tons).

The rubber kings of Manaos had pressed their advantage too far. Glorying in their monopoly, they had pushed the price of rubber from ten cents up to three dollars a pound. They had persuaded South American governments to bar the exportation of hevea seeds.

(Continued on page 107)

A MATTER OF BLOOD

By R. W. DALY

WALKING along a weather-grayed quay in the inner harbor of Brest, Raoul looked at the thirty-two gun frigate *Diomede* and regretted that the upstart Napoleon's passion for smartness had yet to infect the French Navy. Wiry shoulders square in bright new blue broadcloth, Raoul went up to the frigate's gangplank.

His thin-boned face held a shadow of sadness. The frigate's beauty had simply aged away like that of the courtesans of Louis XVI, who had flourished when honest craftsmen laid the *Diomede's* keel. His sharp brown eyes narrowed as he noted the details of cracking paint, fraying rigging and dented sides.

Straighter and prouder than a tall grenadier of the Guards, he went aboard. No one stopped him or acknowledged his presence. There was no watch at the entry port. He paused on the

Raoul dashed to the gunport, and his triumph became bile. . . .

dirty weatherdeck. A few men perfunctorily carried pails of garbage to the bulwarks and dumped the slops into the filthy waters of the harbor. Raoul's patrician nose lifted. He walked aft to the officers country.

In the wardroom, strewn with dishes, newspapers and debris, a handful of officers indolently stared at him. No one rose in recognition of his double epaulettes. Raoul chose to ignore such discourtesy and knocked on the captain's door.

Captain Lespard was little better than his ship or men. Lespard had been an enlisted man when the Revolution swept through France, and to him, the manners of a gentleman were to be mocked rather than imitated.

"My new second in command, eh?" he said, thick fingers riffling through Raoul's documents. "I suppose you prefer to be called 'Baron?' "

"I have that rank," Raoul replied.

"Here you will be Fregault. We have no barons."

Raoul measured the stocky, stout-armed captain who was contemptuously looking him up and down. Since his return to France, he had often met the vitriol of Jacobins whose bloodlust had been curbed by the emperor. However, he had returned to fight the English. That was most important. Therefore, he had to accept the insults of his own people.

"As you wish, *monsieur.*"

"Address me as 'Captain,' " Lespard said curtly. He had risen to his state in life by shrewd manipulation of potential rivals. This aristo was beneath notice, too cowed to threaten his position. "Here we have no *monsieurs.*"

Raoul nodded pleasantly. He could have little quarrel with that statement.

"I see that you were an *élève* in the Old Navy, then wound up in Russia like a good emigre and entered their service. Too bad they don't fight. You might have been killed."

"I served a dozen years under Ushakov in the Black Sea and Mediterranean," Raoul said pointedly. Ushakov was an excellent admiral, whose reputation was known in France. Ushakov was a fighter and Raoul had Turkish lead in his body.

Lespard was unimpressed. Carelessly tossing Raoul's papers to one side, he sat back. "And so, when our sainted emperor celebrated his crown by an amnesty for you old aristos, you came back, eh?" He disgustedly poured himself a glass of strong, red wine. "Why did they send you to me? Who is my enemy in Paris?"

"The admiral here served under my father," Raoul said quietly.

Lespard snapped his fingers. "That for the admiral and your traitorous father!"

With the practice of disciplined years, Raoul held his temper, but had to make one thing clear. "France is my country as well as yours, Captain."

"France doesn't need you or your kind!"

"This ship certainly does."

Lespard's hand shook. Wine spilled on his rumpled, filthy shirt front, as he suddenly saw the ghosts of other slim, cool precise officers who had vanished in the hemorrhage of the Revolution. He put down his glass, recognizing a rival after all. He studied Raoul anew and concluded that the little aristo was probably dangerous.

"That will do," he said thoughtfully. He would have to get rid of M. le Baron Raoul St. Etienne Fregault.

Raoul was frightened by Lespard's rough, glowering face, but he had a job to do. Napoleon was looking for admirals. Napoleon promoted men for ability, despite their age. Raoul meant to fly his own flag in the teeth of the English, as his ancestors had before him, and so he had the courage to turn his back to Lespard and walk out of the cabin.

HIS presence was immediately a weight in the *Diomede.* As *seconde capitaine,* he was responsible for the maintenance and training of ship and crew. The regulations were designed to free Lespard of all worries other than fighting. Raoul took those regulations seriously and the *Diomede* would also take them seriously. He began with the officers.

"Messieurs," he said in the wardroom. "I am Fregault, *seconde capitaine."* He felt cold in the focus of their hostile eyes. "All who are unsuitably attired will retire to their quarters. I expect you in the future to present the appearance and example befitting your rank."

Stunned officers gaped, a few laughed, and no one left, glancing curiously or incredulously at each other, both unwilling

and unable to obey a flat command so prejudicial to their pride.

Raoul was prepared for resistance. There was a remedy compounded of sulphur, charcoal and saltpeter. He felt very cold. "As you wish, *messieurs*. Appoint a spokesman who will meet me an hour hence in the Bois de Tisan." He bowed in the old manner, unperturbed by their smirks, and went his way.

An hour later, he dismounted from a carriage at the traditional dueling grounds for the Brest fleet, and was not surprised to find that all of the *Diomede's* officers had come to enjoy a spectacle.

"We could not agree on a spokesman, *monsieur,*" said Lieutenant Regnier, grinning down from broad-shouldered height. "We will take turns by seniority, myself first, Sartre next, and so on."

"Very well," Raoul murmured, outwardly unperturbed, but tighter than a towline strained by a hurricane. He produced his pistol case. "Let us march."

Regnier was a good shot but his skill did not compare with that of a man who had whiled away bleak Russian winters by perfecting his marksmanship. At twenty paces, Regnier had a small target. Raoul waved his hand and sardonically offered himself for first fire. Regnier confidently shot for the head.

Raoul felt a sharp, blinding blow and collapsed into blackness. He came to beneath the ministrations of the *Diomede's* surgeon. Head heavily bandaged, dazzled by pain, he struggled to his feet.

Dressed and ready to go, Regnier stared at him.

"My pistol," Raoul said calmly. Suddenly, there were no smiles on the faces watching his small, enfeebled figure. Amazed, Regnier started to speak, then valiantly resumed his position while the surgeon uselessly remonstrated with Raoul. "*Noblesse oblige,*" Raoul smiled. "*Monsieur* Regnier would be chagrined if I did not honor him. You need not remove your jacket, *m'sieu.*"

Regnier barely moved his head in acknowledgment.

Deliberately leveling his pistol, Raoul admired Regnier's toughness. The *Diomede's* senior lieutenant folded thick arms and faced him squarely. The little clearing was more hushed than Notre Dame during a funeral service. It was obvious to all that Regnier would live by the tolerance of M. le Baron Raoul St. Etienne Fregault.

To let this sink in, Raoul delayed eternal seconds. Then his pistol exploded. Lieutenant Regnier was abruptly denuded of the heavy gold epaulette proudly sitting on his left shoulder. Regnier grunted in the shower of braid but he lived.

As Regnier numbly massaged his throbbing shoulder, Raoul bowed and began to reload. "And now, M'sieu Sartre?"

"We will fire together," Sartre said suspiciously. "On a count."

"As you wish," Raoul smiled indifferently and seemed more ferocious than a famished leopard.

Firing on a count made little difference except that Sartre had to hurry his shot and missed. Raoul did not. His slug furrowed Sartre's shirted shoulder precisely as his first had wounded Regnier. Sartre yelped and the *Diomede's* officers dimly perceived that their new *second capitaine* could put a bullet exactly where he wished. Regnier and Sartre had aimed to kill; Raoul to display his skill. Everyone suddenly viewed him with respect.

Regnier did the honors of formal surrender. There was no shame in submitting to authority expressed by a man of high courage. "This will suffice, *monsieur,*" Regnier said, as Raoul awaited a third adversary.

Like a harassed doctor finishing one of many home calls, Raoul nodded, picked up his pistols, and left.

HIS first step in the *Diomede's* regeneration was a success. Secretly pleased at the excuse to become real officers, Regnier and his colleagues read and obeyed the regulations. They were, in fact, delighted, having arrived at a rank impossible for them in the old regime, but having found little satisfaction in having epaulettes in the demoralized, neglected Navy of the Revolution.

Only Captain Lespard was displeased. His eyes were narrowed and thoughtful as he watched the transformation in Regnier and the rest.

Raoul confidently turned to the crew, knowing there was some latent pride on which he could build. However, the years of mutiny and quarterdeck guillotines had sapped whatever discipline had been left

after the loss of the aristos. The handful of seamen who had wished to carry on the worthy traditions of France had not been supported by their precariously situated officers. Disgruntled, most of the able men had entered the Army long before the rise of Bonaparte.

Raoul ran into apathy. The men with whom he had to work were either shiftless or physically unsuited for the Army. The old tradition of a taut ship was a hazy memory. In the years of decay, the men had usurped privileges from officers either too weak to protest or too recently elevated to authority to do anything unpopular.

In trying to make the *Diomede* into an efficient frigate, then, Raoul faced a task which would have baffled Hercules.

Snug in his cabin, Lespard watched Raoul's first efforts and shrewdly refused to worry about the support of his officers, because he was sure of the crew. Lespard had come from such a crew and knew them like brothers. They were not at all well disposed towards the threat to their pleasures, particularly after they had a few discreet words from their captain to encourage them.

Raoul met stolid resistance. Patiently he tried every expedient based upon an appeal to pride. Nothing and no one worked. Finally, he sent for the *maître,* who had been most lax in his duties as boatswain.

"By noon tomorrow," Raoul said, "this ship will be reasonably clean."

The *maître* worried his mustaches and squinted down at the clear eyes coldly staring at him below a blood-stained bandage. The *maître* promised to do his best.

"Your best has not been good enough," Raoul said, disgustedly indicating the cluttered weatherdeck. "Ask your guardian angel for help."

Unfortunately for the *maître,* his guardian angel had long since resigned, and so, by the following noon, the *Diomede* had received only a few half-hearted swipes from the mops of his few good-hearted friends. The bulk of the crew lolled about and offered lewd encouragement.

"It's pitiful," Regnier said to Raoul. "The ship looks as bad as ever."

"So?" Raoul murmured, looking up from the table where he was instructing junior officers in the art of navigation.

Regnier significantly buckled on his sword belt and picked up a pistol. "We are with you, *monsieur.*"

Raoul glanced at the clock. "That won't be necessary, *mon brave.* Continue preparing your charts for our next sortie." And then, with a detached coolness that astounded his subordinates, he completed his instruction.

Precisely at noon, Raoul went topside and courteously saluted Captain Lespard who had found a pretext to be on deck to observe.

In a swift survey, Raoul appraised and rejected the *maître's* feeble efforts. Then he walked over to Lespard. "Permission to go ashore, Captain?"

"Eh?" Lespard growled, not having heard such an expression for several years.

"I must attend to a personnel matter. I am responsible for the crew, you know. There is a deficiency."

Finding a speck of spice in actually behaving like a captain, Lespard straightened. "Permission granted." Then, his swart face frowning and baffled, he stood at the rail and watched the *Diomede's* miniature Hercules march up the quay.

The *maître* fawningly sidled up and Lespard nearly snapped his head off. Lespard was not altogether certain that inertia had won for him. There was something disquieting about having an admiral who had once served under a Baron de Fregault.

Then, as Raoul marched back, Lespard was sure of defeat. Raoul had a powerful, tough Breton in tow. Nodding politely at Lespard, Raoul beckoned to the *maître,* held out an envelope and said, "Vacate your quarters before sunset."

The flabbergasted *maître* stared appealingly at Lespard.

"Explain," Lespard said.

"I gave a reasonable order which was not obeyed, Captain."

Like sharks drawn by blood, the *Diomede's* deck swarmed with casual onlookers, and conspicuous among them were Regnier and the officers, fully armed. Lespard was galled by Raoul's coolness, as Raoul produced the ship's *Standing Order Book* to support him. There, in Lespard's own strong fist, was an unequivocal and customary order to keep the ship clean. Lespard only hesitated a moment. A wise man doesn't die for a trifle.

"Pack," he said to the *maître.*

That evening, when the Breton began to organize work parties, the new *maître* was vastly assisted by the rumor that his predecessor had been transferred to a hellhole named Cayenne in far-off Guiana. The crew reluctantly turned to, for work was a lesser evil than Cayenne.

But they did not like it.

Off in his cabin, listening to the patter of bare feet and the vigorous swishing of mops, Lespard was too upset to touch his evening bottle of wine.

BY THE end of a week, thanks to Raoul and the Breton, loyally seconded by the officers, the *Diomede* began to look like her old self. Her decks were healthy and unencumbered. Her rigging was strong and taut and being served. Her sides glistened under several coats of good paint. The rot in her timbers had been picked out and replaced by solid oak.

Captains and officers from other ships came to call. At last the admiral came, stomped about with the gimlet eye of a lieutenant of the Old Navy, and congratulated Lespard for having the only ship worthy to fly the colors of France.

Such attention did not gratify Lespard. He had made his place by being inconspicuous. Publicity was dangerous. Other captains, to whom the *Diomede* was held up as an example by the admiral, began to have discussions which shook Lespard. When his colleagues accused him of trying to discredit them, he honestly gave complete credit to M. le Baron Raoul St. Etienne Fregault. They smiled away such modesty.

"You have always known which leg the dog would lift," they said with open, envious hatred. "You were the first to sniff the fresh wind sweeping France. M. le Baron is only your convenient excuse for becoming Buonaparte's pet."

The more Lespard protested, the less he was believed. In the end, he saw that he could not afford to wait. And so, before it was too late, he had a conference with some of his most trusted men.

Thus, one morning, Raoul was on deck discussing guns with Regnier while Sartre supervised a working party in swaying up a replacement for the main topgallant yard. Absorbed in ways and means of restoring the *Diomede's* long-neglected weapons to efficiency, Raoul was slow to react to Sartre's sudden, horrified shout.

Regnier thought for him. The big lieutenant threw him flat in the space between two carronades just as the thick, forty-foot topgallant spar crashed heavily onto the deck where they had been standing.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Raoul gasped, staring at the foot-thick spar resting on the rail over his head. He glanced at Regnier. "*Merci.*"

Regnier smiled, pointed a finger like a pistol, and said, "My pleasure, *monsieur.*"

White-faced, Sartre ran over, volubly explaining that he could not understand how the accident had happened, because he and the Breton had carefully rigged preventers and taken every precaution.

Brushing himself off, Raoul said to Sartre's relief, "I'm sure you did. I inspected your arrangements. It must be the rope, *mon ami.* Discard your present lines and insist upon being given absolutely new coils. That old material they issue isn't even fit for caulking.

Regnier had been examining a line still attached to the yard. "Look at that, *monsieur,*" he said, his face darkening. "I'd swear one strand was cut and the others weakened. This wasn't an accident."

Raoul glanced at the end in Regnier's hand. One strand indeed showed traces of a sharp edge. He felt a surge of nausea, but met Regnier's eyes. "It was an accident."

"Very well," Regnier agreed doubtfully, thinking that Raoul was a trusting fool and resolving to keep a close watch over him.

This was unjust to Raoul. He knew without further investigation that Regnier's suspicion must be correct, but he knew equally well that Lespard's tracks would be covered. A board of inquiry would never lead to the *Diomede's* Captain and therefore Raoul's danger would not be eliminated. He had anticipated such measures from a man of Lespard's character. Now that he had evidence of his enemy's methods, he would be on guard.

However, luck rather than vigilance saved him that evening. He was in the shot locker inspecting the ravages of sloshing bilges upon the spheres of crude metal which were the *Diomede's* fangs. The eighteen-pound shot were rusted together after years of not being disturbed. Deep in thought, he couldn't decide whether he should draw fresh shot or put the crew to

work scaling the old down to bright iron. That would keep the crew out of mischief for a long time, but in the end, the *Diomede's* guns would be shooting pebbles

Amid his concentration, he heard a rustle. Instinctively, he flattened against a bulkhead, eyes darting about, for like a true sailorman he loathed rats. Thus, snug against a bulkhead, he was barely out of the way when the loading hatch overhead suddenly opened and a ton of shot cascaded into the magazine.

His ankles throbbed from dull, jarring blows. The echoing crash deafened him. He winced as a few shot struck him, but their force had been largely spent in rebounding and he was only bruised instead of crushed. Shaken to the marrow, head ringing, he cowered in his heart, knowing real terror, waiting for the next onslaught.

There was none. A face appeared at the hatch, squinting down into the thick brown cloud of rust stifling the magazine lanthorn. Raoul braced, unable to speak.

"Morbleu, Capitaine!" exclaimed a gunner. "I did not know! Are you hurt?"

RAOUL could only shake his head and put his weakened hands and feet onto the ladder. When he was clear of the orlop deck and safe, he was able to demand an explanation.

"We are receiving fresh shot for the racks tomorrow," the gunner said coolly. "Lieutenant Regnier ordered me to return these to the locker."

"All at once?"

The gunner shrugged and his working party avoided Raoul's eyes.

Raoul stiffly walked up to the officers country. The rust on his face and person told a silent story. Regnier gaped like a man placed eyes-up in the guillotine. Raoul motioned him into his stateroom where he verified the gunner's story.

"I intended to surprise you with fresh shot, *m'sieu.*"

"You did." Raoul began to strip off his clothes.

Regnier jerked a thumb towards the cabin. "He is a devil, that one! Prefer charges and we will back you. Better still, challenge him. No!" He went to the door. "I will challenge him for you."

"One moment." Raoul filled a basin with water. "As a matter of principle, that will not do."

"But why? Twice he has tried to murder you!"

"Did you ever wonder why the English navy has usually been better than ours?" Raoul asked reflectively. "Custom there forbids a subordinate to challenge a superior. A superior can't be bullied. We'll never have real discipline so long as we allow any member of a wardroom to shoot his captain, mon brave."

Baffled, Regnier studied the wiry figure nonchalantly bending over the basin. In his opinion, Raoul had a simple solution to a practical problem. A meeting at arms between Lespard and the supple aristo could only have the best possible outcome. He now knew Raoul well enough to see that this last attempt at murder had shattered his poise, yet his little friend had the steely courage in the midst of treachery to live by principles. Regnier did not quite understand.

"Never mind, *mon ami,*" Raoul said, toweling himself. "This will end some day." He was happy when the door closed behind the perplexed bulk of Lieutenant Regnier, because for long minutes he had been fighting down an irresistible impulse to tremble.

With Regnier gone, he went to bed and let reaction rack his slim body. He longed to accept Regnier's suggestion, but he was dedicated to the navy of France, now that he had been permitted to return, and the navy had to be rebuilt without the enervating mistakes of old. Raoul was afraid for himself, but he hated the English more, and in this hate found strength to override his fear.

The next day, he was summoned to the cabin. Lespard was sprawled in a chair, and although it was before noon, there was an open bottle on his desk. Lespard evidently had cheerful news, for he smiled benignly when he held out an official letter.

"You have brought us honor," Lespard said. "The admiral will trust us at sea."

Raoul saw at a glance that the *Diomede* was ordered to make a timid cruise down to Bordeaux, breaking through the close blockade of Brest and trying to protect the coastal trade. He met Lespard's dark, satisfied eyes.

"When do we sail, Captain?"

"We will run the blockade on the evening tide," Lespard said contentedly. "Let us hope that your luck continues at sea." He raised his glass. "To your health," he said and chuckled like an executioner.

Raoul went white, for a child could have read Lespard's mind. At sea, where there was no admiral who had known the Fregaults, and a captain was God incarnate, Lespard would remove the blot on his reputation and return to comfortable, unambitious mediocrity. A short trip to Bordeaux would reestablish Lespard in the esteem of his fellow captains.

Regnier said bluntly, "Ask the admiral for a transfer. Don't sail with us, Raoul!"

"I must," Raoul said quietly, unfolding a chart of the Iroise. "Did you bring the last reports of the English positions?"

"They were just semaphored from the batteries," Regnier said, producing papers. "This is madness."

"It will do the English good to have us defy them."

"I didn't mean the English."

Raoul straightened and put his hands on his friend's heavy shoulders. "The English are all that matter, *mon brave*."

Regnier scowled.

BREST in the year 1804 was closely blockaded by the British, who chose to counter the French Atlantic fleet by stationing ships almost within gunshot of the batteries covering the narrow entrance into the spacious roads. The tall, black and yellow ships cruised untiringly up and down, perfecting seamanship, and taunting the Frenchmen held in rein by leaders who did not understand the sea. The royal navy was supremely confident of its ability to engage mere Frenchmen at odds of one to five, and this conceit at times made them careless.

It was at such a time in the dead of night that Lespard threaded the channel at slow speed, and sortied boldly into the menace of dim, looming shapes helpfully illuminated by signal lights. Careful observation of a year and more by the patient officers on the hills of Brest had revealed the English identification system, and so the *Diomede* made the right responses.

Put on his mettle, Lespard was nervous and gave many orders which Raoul, standing by the helm, interpreted into a course that carried the *Diomede* into the tight Passage du Toulinguet and five miles down to the Raz de Seins. There Lespard turned east to hug the coast and to protect the brave skippers of barges and schooners who tried to carry on the necessary transport of France despite the omnipresent English.

When the lights of Penmarch were sighted, Lespard relinquished the conn to the watch officers. Stretching his big arms, yawning and scratching his chest, Lespard smugly gave orders for the rest of the night. Proud of what he considered to be his achievement in eluding the big, black ships, Lespard would not have taken kindly the suggestion that M. le Baron had saved the ship a dozen times by clarifying the captain's often stupid commands. If nothing else, Lespard prided himself upon being a good sailor.

Raoul did not care who received credit. He was too happy to be in blue water hunting English pirates.

At dawn, the *Diomede* was entering the Anse du Pouldu, some twenty kilometers up the coast from the entrance to Lorient. Raoul was shaken from sleep by Sartre, who excitedly announced that they had surprised a flotilla of British cutters.

Running topside amid the blare of trumpets and the clumsy clattering of the exuberant crew, Raoul was elated to see four little vessels of the Royal Navy serenely proceeding into the *Diomede's* range. The lieutenant in the flotilla was intent upon a convoy of grain schooners en route to Lorient. If the lieutenant took a second look at the beautiful frigate nosing towards him, he undoubtedly thought that it was coming to assist him with her big guns.

Raoul even had a smile for Lespard. This was one convoy that was going to get through. He was angered by the arrogance of the cutters, whose crews could see a French-built frigate and not be alarmed because the royal navy list was glutted with French-built frigates captured in war. White sails silhouetted against the wild granite cliffs, the English offered a fine target.

"Get to the guns," Lespard snapped at Raoul. "We are late enough in firing."

Raoul was stunned. The range was over a mile. The *Diomede* would be certain of success if she continued her intercepting course until she ran the cutters down.

Shooting at two thousand yards would give the cutters opportunity to scatter and to use their shallower draft to slip in among the rocks.

"Get below!" Lespard thundered.

Reluctantly Raoul obeyed. Standing on the gundeck where the crew tried to remember the lessons he and Regnier had patiently tried to drill into them, Raoul found the grace to overlook Lespard's imbecility. A handful of cutters did not matter. He watched the gun crews clumsily cast loose and load the eighteen-pounders. If nothing else, shooting at live targets would sharpen their appetites.

Lespard's impatient order to fire found the English at a hopeless mile and the *Diomede* only ready for a straggling broadside.

"Incredible," Regnier muttered, watching their shot splash into the first graze and soar on wildly towards the startled British.

"Make a lesson of this," Raoul said. "Number eight hasn't even loaded yet. Attend to them."

Near shore, the British lieutenant cheerfully swallowed his pride and began a brilliant retreat which spread his force wide and robbed Lespard of a choice target. Going from gun to gun, Raoul and the gundeck officers patiently taught what they could, laid a few guns themselves, and disregarded the flight of the cutters. Raoul divided his broadside into four batteries, assigned a target to each, and made an impression on his own when a gun he had sighted scored a hit. Seeing a cutter dissolve in a pillar of spray was more intoxicating than pure alcohol. Being at sea and master of even such an insignificant foe was delirium itself after the long years of impotence.

In the acid stench of gunpowder, performing under the amazed eyes of the merchant seamen who always ridiculed them, the *Diomede's* crew developed into a team. Forgotten skill came back to life. When a second cutter vanished in a double hit, the *Diomede* boomed with a rising, spontaneous cheer.

Raoul's eyes watered, for this was his triumph amid the thudding, bounding guns.

It was good.

Too good to last.

Suddenly, a shot crashed through the starboard side and men screamed in a shower of splinters.

RAOUL dashed to a starboard gunport and his triumph became bile. There, swooping towards the *Diomede's* quarter, two grim British frigates came in from the sea where a hulking fifty-gun cruiser lumbered in support. Raoul's heart pounded. It was useless to accuse Lespard of negligence in permitting the enemy patrol to surprise his preoccupied crew.

Manning the starboard guns, Raoul was an example of steadiness for the gunners. With new-learned skill, French hands cast loose their weapons, rammed shot home on fat flannel powder bags, quilled touchholes, aimed and were ready to thunder defiance the instant Lespard hysterically called for action to starboard. The guns roared back into tackle and the crews worked smoothly with sponge and rammed to reload before the powder haze had wisped out the port side.

Lespard shifted course.

"He's making for the Cochon Shoals," Regnier shouted above the din, while Raoul disgustedly watched the British frigates move aft of the forty-five degree angle of his guns.

"That's exactly where he belongs," Raoul said and Regnier smiled, for *cochon* meant pig.

The gundeck necessarily fell silent as the British formed into a stern chase. Raoul did not know what Lespard hoped to accomplish. Lorient was a good five miles distant. That gave the British plenty of time to overtake the fleeing *Diomede*. The British had the speed of perfect seamanship.

The jubilation which had been the *Diomede's* changed to an equal and opposite gloom, as Nemesis mounted white wings in pursuit of the unlucky French. Raoul walked about the gundeck, trying to inspire courage and confidence, but the crew knew they were in the hands of Lespard, and there was little hope. Here and there, men slumped down to wait dejectedly for the British to carry them off to the prison hulks at Portsmouth. Officers had to be sharp in declining requests to be allowed to go below to ditty boxes to get a few comforts for prison before the English came to loot.

"Lie down!" Raoul trumpeted, for the British were in a raking position. One could fall off the wind at any moment and pour a full broadside into the *Diomede's* stern.

As it was, sure of their quarry, the British didn't even fire bowchasers. Flat on the deck, presenting the smallest possible target to enemy iron, the French dispiritedly waited for the end. Raoul's heart shriveled. The *Diomede* and her officers and men had almost become a real man-of-war.

"We've got to shoot," Raoul said to Regnier. "I'll be back in a moment."

Bounding up the ladder to the quarterdeck, he accosted Lespard. "Permission to cut stern ports in the cabin, Captain?"

Lespard looked dazed. The rocky Cochon Shoals were within a few hundred yards ahead. Astern, the fastest British frigate was at double musket shot.

"What?" he demanded harshly.

"To encourage the crew," Raoul explained, and his eyes were on the nearest frigate. "We can hit her a few times."

As though his words had carried across the waves, the nearest enemy frigate headed abruptly up into the wind, smartly doused sail, and fired a broadside at about five hundred yards. Most of the well aimed shot smashed into the *Diomede's* stern. Screams came from all sides as the cruel iron plowed forward deep into the *Diomede's* vitals.

But the worst scream of all came from the helmsman, as the *Diomede* ran for a narrow passage in the rocks ahead: "The helm has carried away!"

Lespard verified this in a moment as the *Diomede's* head moved to leeward and destruction. He dissolved, both as man and captain. Face white, jaws working, he dashed below.

Raoul did not see him go. He barked orders that stripped the slovenly years from the quarterdeck gang. They moved like Bretons. Within a minute, the boat cradled on davits over the taffrail had a mooring line fast to its bow, and lines looped into the port and starboard quarter chocks of the *Diomede*. Splashing into the water, plug drawn, the boat filled, snapped out astern, and rode as a counterweight substitute for the shattered rudder.

Hauling in on the windward line, Raoul's men braked the *Diomede* up into the wind amidst the hail of shot of the second enemy broadside. The *Diomede* swerved from the rocks daintily and picked her way into the channel. Engrossed in negotiating the gentle turns through the rocks, Raoul still had eyes for everything. The fifty-gun ship with her mammoth thirty-two pounders, left over from her days as a battleship before she lost her upper deck, was clawing up into the wind to clear the seaward end of the shoal. The thirty-two gun frigates astern had shortened sail to follow the *Diomede* into the rocks.

Shortening as necessary the sides of the triangle which led out to the boat dragging astern at the apex, Raoul looked ahead the four miles to safety and knew that the *Diomede* could never outsail her lean pursuers. She would have to stand and fight.

AND so, a few moments after clearing the shoal which at least kept the deep-bellied fifty far out of range, Raoul calmly let go his stern anchor spliced to a double cable and rigged with a spring. Hauling on the starboard line so that the *Diomede* swung into the wind, he gently doused sail, dropped a bower anchor, shook out a little sail, and let the wind blow him down to the point he wanted. There he snubbed her on the anchor lines, set up on the springs, and smiled to see his English pursuers three hundred yards away.

He had good reason to smile. With his springs, he could swing his broadsides. The English could not. It was a perfect gunnery situation, even with amateurs in a crew, and the *Diomede's* men were no longer amateurs. Like a regiment of cavalry moving through a narrow gorge, the English were helpless, their bows exposed to raking.

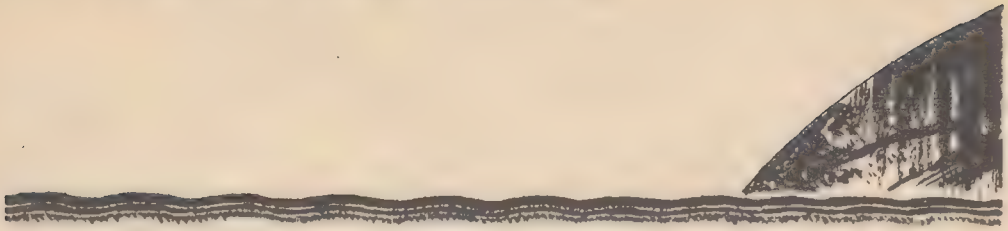
The Frenchmen went to work.

With the deck thudding beneath him, and the nearby hills rocking with concussion, Raoul was happy. Too late, the British went to their pitifully outnumbered bowchasers. Double and triple shotted French guns reached out and smashed the bows of the leading Briton to matchwood. The foremast crashed to leeward, slewed the frigate to port, and rammed her hull into jagged granite. The second Briton, thus exposed, valiantly tried to push ahead, found the rear of his hapless mate blocking the channel, and ran aground on the other side. The British offered a solid mass to shoot at.

Raoul looked like his ancestors at Poictiers and Oudenarde and Majorca, glorying in the fight. For this, he had returned

(Continued on page 112)

An Adventure-Murder Mystery



HIGH EXPLOSIVE

WE MUST have looked as though we were crazy. But that's the way shooting crews always look. There were six of us, stripped to the waist, up to our knees in water and muck on the near shore of the bayou. Six of us, in two fans of three, like a backfield formation, with room enough between us for a truck to pass.

Across, on the far shore of the bayou, we could hear the truck, hurtling through the underbrush with a noise like a threshing-machine. I got a glimpse of the truck's red cab, through the tangle of scrub and cypress, with the *High Explosive* signs on top of the cab swinging crazily.

That truck must have been doing fifty-five. It burst out of the trees, headed for the bayou. The bayou was about twenty-five feet wide and looked like a flower garden. This was because it was choked with water lilies and purple hyacinths, the curse of waterways in the deep South. There was a hogback in the middle that stuck up like the black back of a whale. The half-ton truck hit the water like a hydroplane, seemed to skate across those hyacinths, and hit the hogback. Here it hesitated.

"Hit it!" I yelled.

By J. J. des ORMEAUX

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My second trip was a terrible affair. I reeled with my unwieldy burden as in a nightmare. . . .

I could see the driver come out of his seat and stand on the accelerator. The truck came off the hogback, went into the water like a dolphin. Water went up in solid sheets, on which you could see water lilies and hyacinths like figures on wallpaper.

The six of us closed in on the back of that truck with everything we had. The truck hit the bank, went half up, rocking, roaring, its skid-chains splattering gobs of mud like rapid-fire artillery. It went up over the bank and the six of us went flat in the water. That must have been a pretty spectacle. I came up combing mud and water lilies out of my mouth and hollered:

"Come on, you bums, step on it!"

They were the sweetest shooting crew that ever shot dynamite on a piece of land to find out if it had oil under it. Already the driver was out of his cab and heaving fifty-pound boxes of dynamite off the back of the truck.

A rough clearing had been hacked out of the cypress tangle. Circular mounds of earth marked the thirty-foot holes in the ground where the dynamite would be shot. The shooter, the man that shot the dynamite, was uncoupling his blaster, hooking up his handset telephone to the length of wire alongside him. His two helpers were bundling dynamite sticks together, lowering them down a hole.

The shooter hooked up his blaster, shoved down on the blaster handle. There was something like a dull clap of thunder, and the ground heaved under us in a miniature earthquake. The cypress trees quivered and dead boughs came tumbling down. A fountain of water squirted out of the hole, shot up about fifty feet, came down with a roar. A blast of blue smoke came out of the hole, and everybody scurried to get away. Dynamite smoke is bad stuff to inhale.

"Four minutes," I said to the shooter. "You're getting old, Buck."

I grinned as I walked over and picked up my shirt, kicking it automatically to see if there was a snake underneath.

I was driving them. They knew it. I wondered if they knew why. Maybe they could tell just by looking at me, the tension on me, running through me, overflowing me like an overcharged storage battery. I shoved my shirt tail under my belt, wondered what they would think, if they knew what I knew—the pot of gold we had stumbled on.

I tried not to think about it. In the oil industry, when you have a secret, you try to keep it even from God.

I LOOKED across the tangle of woods and swamp to where some pipes were waving against the sky. They looked like fantastic antennae. Over there more of the crew were putting down more holes. The terrain was impossible for a motorized drilling rig. We had to dig the holes by hand.

That's a sweet job, digging thirty-foot holes with post-hole augers and twenty-eight feet of iron pipe. Try it sometime. Between the hole-diggers and us, some of the boys, with axes and machetes, were hewing a way for the trucks. I could see the swing of their bronzed shoulders.

I looked in the opposite direction, across the bayou, and could see the outlines of another truck, a squat, black, panel job. It looked like an octopus, with its lengths of cable running from it, its intricate instruments. This was the recording truck. There the sound waves from the explosions were picked up, recorded on a seismograph.

That's what we were. A seismograph crew. Or a shooting crew. Or a dynamite crew. We had half a dozen names, some of them not so good, among the farmers, villagers, plantation owners of the Gulf Coast. We had only one job. To find oil. We didn't put down oil wells. That came later, after we had shown the oil companies where the oil was to be found. We had nothing to do with getting the oil out of the ground. Our job was to find it.

And we had found it.

That's why the tension was on me, crowding through me. We had been working this region for a month, up hill and down dale, a sleepy backwater county where nobody dreamed of oil. And now, all at once, in our data, something was shaping up. Indications of that peculiar change, deep in the earth's structure, that told of the accumulation of an oil pool. Here, on the Lester plantation, was the pot of gold.

ANOTHER shot shook the earth under me, vomited blue smoke. One more shot, and the crew would move on, straight as the crow flies, through marsh, thicket,

timber, mosquitoes, moccasins, copperheads and swamp rattlers, to the body of water dead ahead of us they called Little Cat Lake. It was here. I was sure of it, as sure as if I could look straight through the earth and see the oil. All I needed was the confirmation of this one line of shots.

I stood kicking holes in the mud with my toe, like a pawing horse.

Looking over my shoulder, I could just see the top of the Lester house among its magnolia trees. Two women were in that house. Mis' Ellen Lester, frail and middle-aged, and her niece, Val.

They were the Lesters. They owned the plantation. You could see even from here that the colonial pillars on the house needed a coat of paint.

The plantation was mortgaged up to the hilt. It used to raise a lot of cotton, but you couldn't sell cotton for catmeat now. The two women, probably, right now, were wondering how they could pinch and scrimp to get through the coming month. And here, unknown to them, a fortune lay under their feet.

The shooter suddenly began to swear a blue streak.

"What's the matter?"

"The charge is stuck," he said. "It's wedged about eight feet down."

We both stood looking down the hole.

"It's capped and ready to go off," he said. "I can't get it any deeper."

"Shoot it where it is," I said.

His sweaty face looked at me. The battleship tattooed under the hair on his chest was going up and down as if it was bucking a high sea.

"It'll blow up fifty feet of ground," he said.

"What of it? There's nobody around. This land's no good anyway."

"Okay," he said, and turned toward his blaster. Then he stopped. He said to me out of the side of his mouth, "There's the girl."

I shot a look back and saw Val Lester coming through the trees, slim, black-haired, like a boy in her blouse and riding breeches. It was a spot. The shooter and I looked at each other. We couldn't shoot charge in front of her and blow a hole in her plantation big enough to drop a wagon in. We couldn't leave it there because it might accidentally be discharged.

It was my fault. If I hadn't been rushing Buck he'd never have stuck a charge.

I caught up the loading pole, a wood pole about twelve feet long, and rammed it down the hole. Buck grabbed hold of me. "Look out, you fool! You'll blow yourself to hell!"

"Get back," I said. "Clear 'em away from here."

They got out of the clearing in a hurry. I began to hammer on the wedged bundle of dynamite sticks. The sweat was pouring down my back. All I could see was the greasy water in the hole and all I could hear was the *chock! chock!* every time I hit the bundle of dynamite sticks. I could think of a million other things I should have done but I had to go on with it now. Then the bundle of sticks flopped over and went kerplunk to the bottom of the hole.

I mopped the sweat off my face and walked over toward Val Lester.

"Hello," she said. "I thought you were the boss. I thought you didn't have to work."

"You know how it is," I said. "You have to keep your hand in. Okay," I said to Buck. "Shoot it."

She stood slapping her quirt against the top of her boot. She only came up to my shoulder. She was dainty, graceful, straight as a rapier. Her skin was like the magnolia flowers that bloomed around her house. Her hair was deep black and so were her eyes, slumbrous black, with glinting merry lights in them. Those lights could flash wild and reckless.

The Lesters had been a high-spirited, wild clan. The kind that died fast. You could see the spirit, the dash, in every line of this girl.

THE shot went off and she caught me in a startled way by the arm. Her laughing face was close, closer to me than it had ever been. I could see the little individual shadows her long lashes made on her creamy skin. I could see deep down into the sparkling depths of those black eyes. I could also see, on that slim left hand around my arm, the diamond ring sparkling on her third finger.

"My goodness!" she said. "I didn't know it was quite that bad!"

I could still feel the tingle in my arm

where her hand had been. Automatically I snuffed out the tingle. You know how it is with an engaged girl. When anything starts inside you, you put on the brakes. I'd used a lot of brake-power with regard to Val Lester.

"I believe that loosened every tooth in my head," she said. "I see now why your men have to be so tough."

"Tough?" I said. "Why, they're gentle as lambs."

She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes. "I heard about them pulling a row of seats out of the movie theatre in town."

"Oh, that," I said. "That was sheer good spirits. The film showed one of these Hollywood bad men who was afraid to drop a stick of dynamite. They just got laughing too hard."

"Hm," she said. "Well, you look as though you could handle them."

"Thanks," I said. "I suppose that means I look like a bouncer in a cheap bar."

"Well, not exactly." She was still looking at me out of the end of her eyes. "No, Mr. Jim Keith, some tastes might almost find you attractive. When are you going to be done dynamiting?"

"Done? Why? Are we getting on your nerves?"

She drew her fine brows together.

"No, but you see, we're going to have a wedding here tomorrow."

I didn't speak for a minute.

"I wish you a lot of happiness," I said.

She laughed. "Oh, it's not me. It's my Aunt Ellen."

I was very surprised. "Your Aunt Ellen? Well, well. I didn't know."

"Oh, yes, it's an affair of long standing. Colonel Higgins is about as poor as we are. But he and aunt have waited six years and now the colonel's grown impatient. They're to be married tomorrow noon."

She was laughing a little with her eyes as though she were speaking of two children.

"You mean we won't be able to work here tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not," she said. "Some of the guests will be pretty old. They might think the War between the States was starting up again. Do you mind?"

I did mind. We needed our information in a hurry. We had to be in and out of here before some spy or scout of a rival company came snooping around and began to get ideas. The oil game is war. It's organized like the Gestapo.

"Suppose we work here tonight," I said. "That won't interfere with anything, will it?"

"No," she said. "Tonight? You mean work in the dark?"

"Sure."

She looked at me with her brows puckered, jerking the tassel of the quirt caught between her teeth. "I thought you had to see your explosions." She pointed at the recording truck, moving up now on the other side of the bayou. "I thought you photographed the flashes, or something, from that funny truck."

Strange what notions people have about our work. Some of them think we shake the oil together with our charges, the way you'd shake gobs of butter together in a churn.

"We don't need to see the explosions," I said, "All we need to do is hear them."

"Hear them?"

"Yes, the seismograph is just a kind of an ear."

"But I don't understand. Hear them! What's there in them to hear?"

"Well, it's like this," I said. "There's rock layers under the earth. After all, the earth's like a many-layered sandwich. The explosion sends sound waves down into the earth, which bounce off these rock layers, come up again, and the seismograph records them. We shoot a regular checkerboard of shots over the country, measure our sound waves. In that way we map the rock layers, just exactly as if we were making a map of all this." I waved my hand to include the bottom land, the bayou, Little Cat Lake, the house and plantation.

"Oh," she said. "You're making an underground map."

"That's it. About a mile underground."

"But what's the good of an underground map?" she asked. "What's the good of mapping these rock layers?"

"Well," I said, "oil is down there among the rock layers. And if something happens to those layers, like a sudden big blister or bump, the oil gathers around it and forms a pool. Of course there's no sign of anything up here on the surface. It's like a hump or a bump in the bottom crust of a pie."

She looked at me with dancing little

lights in her eyes. "This is fascinating," she said. "You'd have made a wonderful kindergarten teacher. So you're looking for humps or bumps about a mile down in the ground?"

"That's it," I said. "We call such a bump a dome. It's round, like a dome. We just go along like a blind man, tapping with his stick, and listening until we find one."

Her eyes clouded. She made a bitter little twist with her lips.

"Well," she said, "I don't think you'll find any domes around here. You might as well save your time. Nothing like that could ever happen to the Lesters."

I WONDERED what she'd say if she knew she was standing over a dome. You might say, why not tell her? It was going to be *her* oil. Well, because if one whisper of the fact got out, any Tom, Dick or Harry could drive up and knock on the front door and get a lease from the Lesters. An oil lease, giving him the exclusive right to drill oil wells on the property. And then my company, with its grief, trouble, outlay and expenditure, would be out in the cold.

One of the boys from the recording truck ran up with six or seven long strips of paper. I spread them out and looked at them.

"What are those funny little streamers?" she asked.

"Just the records of our shots," I said.

If she had caught hold of my arm then she would have found it hard as a board. The tension, energy, exultation, were mounting through me like a wave. It was true. Here was the confirmation. I could put my thumb on the dome. It was right here. Right under these forty acres of God-forsaken, good-for-nothing bottom land.

Two horses splashed out of the bayou, a roan mare and a black gelding. The man riding the gelding was leaning from the saddle to guide the mare by the bridle. He was young, bare-headed, and the orange knotted scarf made a splash of gold at the throat of his tweed jacket.

Val turned around. "Hello, Beau."

He dismounted and linked both reins in his arms.

"Hello, Keith," he said.

This was Beau Burr, her fiancé. He was a handsome devil, square-shouldered, very dark, with direct and sullen eyes. He looked very spruce, very crisp, his hair immaculate, the highlights gleaming on his polished boots. Automatically I looked at his boutonniere. This time it was violets, a round knot of them, very close and compact. He always wore a boutonniere. That's why he was called "Beau" Burr.

He didn't look as if he felt particularly pleased at finding her talking to me.

"I thought we were going riding," he said to her.

"We are," she said.

That was all they said, no more. He moved her horse around and held the stirrup for her. You'd have thought they'd have laughed, passed it off, joked in some way. Not that her remark, or the silence afterward, was tipped with anything; it was entirely casual. It was a little peculiar. It was almost as if they'd been married for years.

As she swung up she said to me: "Since you're coming back tonight, why don't you come up for dinner? I'd love to hear more about those humps and bumps and angleworm tracks."

"Thank you," I said. "I'd like to."

Beau gave me a look out of those sullen eyes for half a second, a somewhat surprised, fixed look. Then he swung his horse and they were gone.

I stood looking after them. Val was slim, erect on the roan mare, her hair flying backward and the sun catching in it now and then like a tangle of fireflies. Beau sat competent, easy, part of his horse, a corner of the orange scarf fluttering over one broad shoulder. The clang of pipe, far cries, the roar of truck motors, drowned out the sound of their hoofs entirely. I shot a piece of caked mud off my forearm. The lucky devil. To get a girl like that—and a fortune to boot.

CHAPTER 2

I DROVE back to town with Buck, the shooter. Buck had a dynamite headache. Nitroglycerine is a powerful heart stimulant. Handling it all day, breathing it in the heat, will get even the most hardened shooter occasionally. Even one with a skull like Buck, who, when properly fortified,

would look around a bar and invite anyone to break a bottle over his head.

We pulled up in front of a dun-colored barnlike building with an arcade, drooping awnings, wicker chairs underneath looking over the sleepy main street. The most conspicuous thing about the building was the gold lettering on the second story:

BURR BROTHERS & GASSENDI
LAW OFFICE

One of the Burr brothers was Beau Burr. The other was Tyce Burr, the head of the firm. Gassendi was a little Creole who looked like an opossum.

We stopped in downstairs while Buck got his special remedy for dynamite headaches, sloe gin mixed with rye. We went on through the bar and up some creaky wooden stairs to my office. I had rented it here because Burr Brothers & Gassendi were the only office on the floor, and with an empty office between us, me, my maps, records and data had complete privacy.

We were passing the glass door of the law office when Buck poked my arm.

"Look at that," he said.

I looked through the door and saw Gassendi standing in the inner office. His roly-poly body in its tight brown suit was sideways to us and we could see his square sharp little nose. He was opening and closing an umbrella. He opened it and closed it about a dozen times, pointing it at the floor, the walls, the ceiling. That was funny. The little Creole, standing there all by himself, opening and closing an umbrella. He had always reminded me of the dormouse in "Alice in Wonderland," and this looked like something the dormouse might do.

Then his sharp little voice said:

"Don't you see? No matter how you open it, you always point the handle at yourself."

Oh, so he wasn't alone. A chair creaked and a deeper bass voice said: "Yes, I prefer the Keith angle."

I stopped. The chair creaked again, a big foot came into view, a trousercuff was pulled up, and the long form of Tyce Burr came between us and Gassendi. I could see the movement of his close-shaven jowls, continually chewing gum. He took the umbrella from Gassendi and hung it on the coat rack. He went on in his bass voice: "Maybe he will, maybe he won't. If not, the other. We'll keep it from Beau. He'll blab anything when he's drunk."

"Why, it's a natural!" replied Gassendi. He rubbed the end of his sharp little nose, took out of one tight pocket one of those little tin boxes that typewriter ribbons come in. "Do you see this gumbo? I made it myself by stewing old cigars."

"Let me see the sketch," said Tyce Burr.

Both leaned over a desk with their backs to us and pored over a sheet of paper.

"It looks good," said Tyce. "But I prefer the Keith angle."

I opened the door and walked in. "What's all this about my angle?"

Both turned their heads.

"Oh, hello, Keith," said Tyce.

I walked over and looked over their shoulders. "What you got here? You two going into the drilling game?"

The sketch showed the conventional cross-section of a well, with some apparatus inside I could not make out. Tyce Burr laughed.

"Just a new way of shooting a well," he said.

I was surprised. Shooting a well is a technical operation, done sometimes at the bottom of a completed well to make the oil flow.

Gassendi tucked his briefcase under his arm and went out, his eyes straight ahead, as if he were lost in thought or some kind of sleep walker.

Tyce closed the inner door. He drew the shades down. He switched on the lights. He came back and sat down at his desk.

"Sit down," he said.

I sat on the rim of Gassendi's desk.

Tyce was not as handsome as his brother. He was big-boned, with a bullet head, and the blackest beard I ever saw on a man. If he had let that beard grow he would have had hair all over his face like an orang outang. But he shaved it close, and it made a peculiar design on his face, very blue on his upper lip, very black on his chin, and rounding on his cheeks in two crescents that almost came up to his eyes.

It looked like a stenciled mask.

"There's ging to be a wedding over at the Lester plantation tomorrow," he said. "Mis' Ellen and Colonel Higgins."

"So I heard," I said.

"The women are strapped for the expense of the wedding," he went on. "Val Lester was in to see me this morning about

raising some cash. You see, we handle their affairs. As a matter of fact, I have their power of attorney."

"What's this got to do with me?"

"Just this," he said. "I know you've got something. I know it's on the Lester plantation."

I felt a kind of cold breeze blowing up my back.

He laughed.

"I could stall you," he said. "But what's the use? There's an empty office between us. It's our office; we use it for storage. Gassendi has rubber heels. Didn't you ever notice?"

I took a cigarette out of my shirt pocket and turned it around between my lips. I couldn't get the end wet.

"He heard a couple of long-distance telephone calls to New Orleans."

"You've been eavesdropping on my conversations with the head office, eh?"

"I'll be frank with you," he said. "He heard you mention a dome on the Lester plantation. Only trouble is, he didn't hear enough. The Lester plantation's a big property. We don't know what part of it the dome's on."

He got up and walked a couple of steps.

"Don't get riled," he said. "It was pure accident, but it may work out to be the best thing that ever happened. Wait till I get to the part that shapes up pretty for you. I could, of course, dump you flat on your back by clapping an oil lease on the property. But I'm not going to do that."

Across the red streak in my mind his last words cut hard. An oil lease. Yes. He could do that. It would give him exclusive right to do any drilling on the plantation, to get any oil out of it. He had me, he had the company, right where he wanted us. I cupped my hands and lit the cigarette while I got myself in hand.

HE took the empty gum wrapper from his desk and creased it between his fingers.

"If you could designate the location of the dome," he said, "I could raise the money for the wedding expenses."

We might have been talking about the chewing gum wrapper.

"I don't get it," I said.

He sat down again. "There's about a thousand acres in the Lester plantation. About the only way to raise the cash would be to sell some of it. Val Lester understands this, of course. Not that there are any buyers. But suppose Burr Brothers & Gassendi were to be the buyers. Not a big piece, of course. Nothing of any considerable extent. But say forty acres of worthless bottom land."

He turned around in his chair, rubbing his hand over the stencil on his face, and looked out the windows.

"Or," he said, "whatever piece of acreage you would designate. That being done, I would give you the oil lease on the acreage I had bought. I don't mean you as a company, I mean you as an individual. For nothing. For one dollar and other valuable considerations. That is to say, one dollar and our mutual trust."

He shifted his gum from one side of his mouth to the other and his bass voice became a kind of purr.

"You realize, of course, that in giving you the lease I would be giving you the lion's share. As the lease holder, you would get the bulk of the proceeds from the oil, I would get only the owner's fraction. But under the circumstances it would—look more seemly—for me not to have the lease."

I blew smoke softly between my lips. It was perfect. He would sell himself the dome acreage to raise money for the wedding expenses. It would be a favor to the Lesters. It would be fitting, sporting, a generous gesture from the family with whom the Lesters were one day to be linked. He would take no oil lease—not on forty acres, not on a thousand acres. The suggestion of oil would not sully his fingers. But when, subsequently, it turned out that there was oil under his acreage, that would be pure accident, the sheerest stroke of providence. The bread he had cast on the waters would return to him ten thousandfold.

"Has Beau the power of attorney?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I have." He opened a drawer, took out the paper, spread it for me to read. "Understand, this won't be any good after tomorrow morning. Tomorrow Colonel Higgins takes over. He'll handle everything. The opportunity is only good until tomorrow noon."

I scrubbed out my cigarette in Gassendi's ash tray. It was true, he had to act quickly. There was no sign of it on him. He sat there

big-boned, relaxed, his wide mouth going sideways with his gum. There was almost a kind of simplicity in those eyes, certainly directness, frankness.

All I had to tell him was which forty acres.

"Well," he said, "how about it? What do you think?"

"I've been trying to think of the name of the animal they get when they breed a rat with a skunk," I said.

He looked at me. His jaws clamped on the gum. His spatulate fingers contracted on his thighs. His eyes were fixed, black, and wide. I'm six feet two and can lift a hundred pounds of dynamite in either hand.

He thought better of it. The gum began going again.

"You mean you won't do it?" he rasped. "You mean you'd rather keep a little two-by-four job than make forty or fifty grand?"

"You're kind of tough on a couple of women," I said. "Maybe the colonel ought to take this up. Maybe this is something he'd like a hand in."

He snorted. "You can't tell him. You can't tell the Lesters. You can't tell anybody. You can't even peep about the possibility of oil."

"That's right," I said. "You've got me there." I lit another cigarette, and still holding the match, picked up the power of attorney, and set fire to it. It went up, being excellent rag paper, in a sputtering red crackle of flame.

He got up. His face looked like a death's head.

"I guess that's all I can do," I said.

HE DIDN'T follow me to the door. There was not the slightest sound from any part of the hall as I went into my office. Buck was sitting at my desk studying something. I looked at it.

"What the—"

It was the sketch Gassendi and Tyce Burr had been poring over in their office.

I put my hands on my hips and snorted.

"So that's what you were doing sitting on that desk," I said.

"Sure," he said. "If it's a new way of shooting a well I ought to know it. But I can't make head or tail out of it. What the hell is this dingus?"

He had his thumb on a series of whorls or spirals in the upper part of the drawing.

"I can't imagine," I said. "Take your thumb off."

The sketch showed two descending parallel lines, joined together at the bottom and open at the top, representing the descending tube of a well underground. The series of spirals were inside the well, at the top, and attached to them was a kind of pin. This was apparently some sharp and special sort of drill. That was all there was in the well, except, at the bottom, a rim. This rim seemed inset to plug the bottom.

Buck scratched his head and tapped the pin attached to the spirals.

"If that's a drill," he said, "I never did see a drill attached to a corkscrew like that."

I shook my head.

"That rim at the bottom," he said. "That might be a plug of concrete. I wish to hell they'd labeled it. You need to be a magician to—"

"Listen," I said. "if either of those two monkeys ever shows up around the crew, give 'em the bum's rush."

"Huh? Them two? Why?"

"They've been listening through that empty office and getting an earful of my calls to New Orleans."

Buck got up with alacrity.

"Listen," he said. "Shall we—"

"No," I said. "We'll get out there tonight and get the rest of that shooting. We're due to clear out of this dump tomorrow."

CHAPTER 3

I GOT up to the Lester house for my dinner date a little early—a little early and in a hurry. I had only taken time to bathe, shave, and dive into a clean suit of flannels. It had occurred to me that bullet head on top of Tyce Burr's shoulders was nimble at other things than chewing gum, and whatever he was going to do, he would work fast. I didn't know what way he was going to jump, but there was only one thing for me to do. To protect the company, I would have to try to get that oil lease myself.

The scent of the flowers was heavy around me as I rang the bell. The pig-tailed girl that opened up to me rolled her eyes, backed up several steps before me, and pointed to an adjacent door.

Maybe that should have been the tipoff, but my business was too hot on my mind and tongue to notice. I came through the doorway and found Mis' Ellen and Val standing together at the foot of a wide staircase.

"Good evening," I said. "I don't like to seem precipitate, but I'd like to talk to you about an oil lease."

Mis' Ellen had one hand on the balustrade, and she took it off and put the back of it against her mouth. All I could see of her frail pointed face were her wide gentle eyes, and they looked more gentle and scared than ever. Val's lips parted, then closed. She still had her riding-habit on and her quirt in her hand.

She looked at Mis' Ellen.

"You see?" she said. "That proves it."

I suddenly saw she was very pale.

"So you did find a dome, or whatever you call it, on this plantation," she said.

The shock inside me must have been mirrored on my face.

I said, "That's nothing I can tell you one way or another. That information belongs to my employers, the Petroleum Exploration Company, not to me."

Her voice was not very steady.

"But you could tell it to Tyce Burr, couldn't you, to try to swindle us!"

She took two steps toward me. I could hear the light sharp sound of her heels. The light from the chandelier gleamed blue-black on her hair and her eyes were snapping like hot coals.

"We know the proposition you made to Tyce Burr! That you'd tell him just where the dome was, if he'd use his power of attorney, make a paper sale of the spot to himself, then lease it to you!"

I stared at her.

"And now," she said, her voice quivering and crackling like a branch on fire, "now that you've failed with him, you come running up here, trying to get the lease from us before we know!"

I must have stood there like a dummy. "*I* made *him* a proposition?" I said. "Tyce Burr told you that?"

"No! Beau did."

"*Beau* did!"

"Yes. Tyce wanted to drop the whole matter, but Beau called me up and told me."

So that was it. I could see it clearly. Tyce had worked fast, all right. He had gotten Beau to call her up, relate the story in reverse. The role I had played, Tyce had given himself, and Tyce's part had been dropped over me. We'd just switched parts.

A door beside the staircase opened and Colonel Higgins came in. He was a squared little ramrod of a man, with a pouter pigeon chest, a grey goatee, and a glassy stare. I didn't know what he knew or had heard. He simply stood there and looked at us. Mis' Ellen made a little sound and fluttered over to him. The diversion got me back on keel.

I said, "You got to get this straight. Tyce Burr's trying to rook you. He's trying to take any oil that may be here right out from under you. He knew you were trying to raise money for the wedding expenses. He talked to me in his office. He said if I'd designate the location of the oil, he'd sell the piece of acreage to himself, give me the lease on it."

It's hard to describe how weak an accusation sounds, when you turn it, point for point as it's been put on you, back on another person. The very weakness of it shook off the grip I had on my temper.

"Listen," I said. "This sweet specimen of a fiance of yours, with his bunch of violets, is nothing but Tyce's stooge. So is that fat little backview of a rat, Gassendi, between them they listened through the adjoining office, eavesdropped on my telephone conversations with the head office. That's how they got their information. With it, Tyce tried to pull me into the scheme. He's out to gyp you, do you understand? He'll take you in like he'd put a piece of gum in his mouth! Now he's cooked up this mess of bunk about me for you to swallow!"

Her face was white and set, and her eyes were flaming like black stars, and I don't think I'd ever seen anything more beautiful in my life.

"Why should he lie about you?" she said.

"Why?" I said. "Because I turned him down! Because I burned his power of attorney! To get me! To stop me! He knew the first thing I'd do, to protect the company, was to come up here and try to get a lease from you! So as to stop me, my crew, my company, cold!"

Her lip curled. "If *he'd* been behind it, as you say, if *he'd* been trying to get the oil

for himself, why would he tell us, now, that there *is* oil here?"

That was a poser. She had me there. He had told them exactly what, to bring off his own game, he should never have breathed. By telling them there was oil on the plantation, he had scuttled his own chances.

"You can't answer," she said, and her tone cut me like the end of a whip. "Well, I'll answer for you. It's because Tyce and Beau are right! Because you, hiding behind your company, pretending to work in their interest, have tried to swindle a couple of women who've extended every courtesy and friendship to you."

The breath was coming in and out of my mouth. I started forward.

"Where are they?" I said. "Where are they? Let them tell me this themselves."

She took a quick step and put herself in front of me.

"Stop there," she said. "Don't you dare take another step in this house. Get out of here, you, and your crew, and your Petroleum Exploration Company! Get off this plantation and never set foot on it again!"

THE chandelier wasn't shining on her hair, now, it was in her eyes, and they seemed to leap like flames. This was only a little slip of a girl, but in those black eyes surged all the wild, hot blood of the Lesters. Yet there was something else in them too, something wounded, deep down, the very fact of which made her all the more furious. I think if I'd taken another step she'd have hit me with the quirt.

The voice of Colonel Higgins cut across us.

"Petroleum Exploration Company?" he said. "Are you connected with the Petroleum Exploration Company?"

"That's it," I said.

"Give me that telephone," said the colonel. He picked it up from the alcove, got long distance.

"Get me O. P. MacIntyre, the Petroleum Exploration Company, New Orleans," he said.

I stood and stared at him. He was calling the president of my company.

"Hello. Mr. MacIntyre?" he said. "I am speaking for Miss Ellen Lester. You telephoned her this morning in regard to leasing the oil rights on the Lester Plantation. I believe you have a man named Keith in charge of one of your shooting crews out here . . . Yes . . . This man Keith has just been apprehended in a rank attempt at swindling. He approached Miss Lester's attorney's with the proposition that if they would give him a lease on the particular place, he would indicate the place on the property where he had found oil. This interview has been attested by two witnesses. My name is Higgins. I will have the honor to be Miss Lester's husband tomorrow. May I say for you, sir, that this being a sample of the kind of men you employ, you, or anybody connected with you, will never get a lease on the Lester Plantation . . . What's that? Yes, he is."

He turned with the telephone extended as if it were on a forty-foot pole. "He wants to talk to you."

O. P. MacIntyre's voice sounded hoarse and frantic.

"Keith? Hello! That you, Keith?"

"Yes, sir."

"So you double-crossed us, eh? You tried to get the lease for yourself, eh? That's what we get for trusting you, making you a crew-chief, putting you out there!" His voice went up in a hoarse crescendo. "Using the company's information for yourself! A sneak play, eh? A grab on the sly, eh?"

"Listen, let me put my side of it—"

"The hell with your side of it! Two witnesses, he said, didn't he? The information's out! Where could it have come from but you? Listen, do you realize I considered that find so valuable I was trying to get the lease myself? What the hell difference would it make if you were innocent as the newborn day? We'll never get the lease. They'll never give it to us! You've probably lost us half a million dollars! I'll sink you for this! I'll ride you out of the industry! Every outfit on the lot will hear about this!"

"Listen, let me—"

"You're done. You're through. Another man will be there to take over in the morning. You'll get a month's salary in the mail."

The receiver slapped up.

It was quiet in the room and in the silence a clock on the staircase chimed the four silvery notes of the quarter-hour. They had all heard what he said. He could have

been heard away over in Little Cat Lake.

There was another sound in the silence, a rumble and clatter down the plantation driveway, the trucks of my crew coming in. No, not my crew.

"There's that outfit of hooligans now," said the colonel, with a step forward. "I'd better—"

"Stay there," I said. "I'll take care of them."

He gave me his glassy stare.

"I don't know what he has in mind," he said to Val, "but if any of them bother you, give them a taste of this."

He put a small silver-mounted revolver on the table.

I walked past him, past Mis' Ellen, past Val, out the door, across the veranda, and stood in the driveway in the light of the oncoming trucks.

The driver of the lead truck braked up. He put his head out of the cab. It was Buck.

"Go on back," I said. "Go back to town. All of you. Go back and go to bed."

"What's that?" he said. "Go back to town? You mean we're not working here tonight?" I could see his helpers staring at me from inside the cab. "You mean we're to come back in the morning?"

"I don't know," I said. "I got the axe. I'm through. Somebody else will take over in the morning."

I DROVE back to town and came up the creaking wooden stairs to the office of Burr Brothers & Gassendi. Nobody was there. A sign had been tacked up on the door on which was written: "Back at nine-thirty."

I came back downstairs into the bar and sat down. I looked at my watch. It was nine-twenty.

I had a couple of drinks of rye whiskey. Every time the swinging doors creaked I turned around, but it wasn't the Burr brothers or Gassendi. Nobody came in.

I couldn't feel anything at all. It was as if my mind had run into a blank space or vacuum. I felt like a catcher I once saw in a baseball game, who got hit with the end of a bat, and kept squatting and thumping his fist in his glove until they carried him off the field.

Through my brain kept going a senseless image. It was of one of those rows of ducks you see in a shooting gallery, that travel along on a belt, and when you hit one of the ducks it goes *smack!* and there isn't any duck any more.

I could see the situation clearly. A few hours before I'd been standing out there in the hot sun by the bayou, primed with energy, a big discovery under my belt, on fire with pride and drive. Now I was . . .

I wanted to feel it. I wanted to feel it bad. Otherwise I couldn't appreciate meeting the Burr brothers.

O. P. MacIntyre had booted me out of the industry. Not out of a job, out of all jobs. No other company would hire me. Seven years. A long time. You begin at the beginning. You work up. You sweat and plug. You take each job in turn. You finally make the grade and they give you a crew. Seven years. I couldn't do anything else. It was all I knew.

It got to be nine-thirty and the Burr brothers hadn't come. I don't know what quantity of whiskey I had taken in, but I found there wasn't any more in the bottle.

The crew came in. They came in in a row with Buck at their head. They looked a little embarrassed to see me, and didn't sit down at the bar. They walked on by me, and as each one passed me he spoke.

"Hello," they said.

Each turned his head and turned it back again.

"Hello," they said.

They passed on out the back. I sat looking after them. It seemed to me it would have been more appropriate if they had said "Good-by."

An indescribable sound began. It sounded as if the building were falling down. It lasted four or five minutes, while plaster fell off the ceiling and the ceiling fans knocked it all over the room. The boys came through the bar again. I sat and stared at them. They filed out.

The bartender came up from behind the bar. He swore in Creole. "Good God!" he said. "What was that?"

We went up the stairs together. The office of Burr Brothers & Gassendi was a wreck. The door was half off its hinges and hung sagging into the hall. The inside was nothing but a heap. Law books, ledgers, briefs, file cases, desks, chairs and bookcases were smashed, torn, ripped and split into kindling and scraping. The notice on the door was sitting on top of the pile. It

had been turned around. On the back of it was written: "Regards from Keith's crew."

The bartender looked at me. He swallowed. He rubbed his chin with a bristly sound. He didn't say anything.

"Open up another bottle of rye," I said.

We went back to the bar. I had some drinks from the new bottle and the bartender swept up the plaster. It got to be five minutes to ten and still the Burr brothers hadn't come.

THE sheriff came in. He was a lanky man with a mild eye, a moustache like a bedraggled mop, and a black coat buttoned up the front. He looked like a church deacon, but I had seen him knock a squirrel out of a tree, shooting from the hip.

"Hello, son," he said, and sat on the stool alongside me. "This is a small town, and news gets around fast."

I didn't know whether he meant about the law office, or me.

"A beer, Pete. Not carrying any ironware on you, are you?" He patted me around the hips and chest. "That's good. Understand, I'm not taking sides. I never was much on hearsay. But take it easy. Don't try anything. The home folks might not understand."

He put his nose in his beer. *Smack!* and the duck wasn't there any more.

"I'm just warning you," he said. "We don't like trouble around here. We've got a nice little jail. It smells a little, prob'ly from the bedbugs, but it's tight as a drum."

He looked at me with his mild eyes. There was a rim of foam over the bottom of his moustache.

It dawned on me. Of course. They were out at the Lester plantation. The Burr brothers. Where else would they be?

I left the sheriff with his nose in his glass and went out to my car. I drove west out of town while gravel showered around me and smacked the windshield. It was eight miles to the Lester plantation and the trees went by me like a wall. Finally I could see the gleam of Little Cat Lake. There was a plantation road here that debouched around the lake and went up to the house, but the house driveway was a quarter-mile down. I had just passed the plantation road when I saw a pair of polished boots running along the shoulder.

I braked up so fast the car slewed sideways in the gravel.

It was Val Lester. I couldn't see her face, only the thick black ends of her hair on her shoulders and the triangle of her throat.

I sat in the car and stared at her.

"Are they here?" I asked.

She didn't answer.

"Well," I said, "I am going where you are. Get in."

She came up and got in on the opposite side. I shifted gears and started off.

"I might have known they were here," I said.

She said nothing. I reached the house driveway. I could see the house, big and entirely dark.

"Don't turn in here," she said.

I looked at her for the first time. Her face was sideways to me and she was looking straight ahead.

"Drive on," she said. "Straight ahead. Keep driving." Her voice gathered itself together and she turned her eyes to me. "I'll give you your oil lease, if you'll marry me."

SOMETHING like that, of course, doesn't register. You understand the words, but they don't mean anything.

I didn't turn in the driveway. I kept going along the gravel. The gravel kept rattling and scrawing under the tires and flying up in a tattoo on the under sides of the fenders. I turned toward her and said: "What did you say?"

"I said if you want the lease on our property," she said, "I'll see that you get the lease on the whole plantation, if you'll marry me. That's the one condition of your getting the lease."

She was looking straight ahead, sitting bolt upright, without touching the seat back.

"Now," she said. "Right now. We can drive twenty miles to the state line. They have over there what they call . . . marriage mills."

I turned completely around in the seat.

"Are you crazy?" I said.

She grabbed the wheel and we missed an overhanging pecan tree. Her voice was tight and cold. "It would be only a formality. That's all it would be. That's understood. We'll stay somewhere tonight, and

in the morning. I'll give you your lease."

I saw her, full face, for the first time. I don't know how to describe it. Her eyes were wide and glassy. She looked like a sleepwalker.

I took one hand off the wheel and rubbed it across my face.

"What's the idea?"

"Don't ask me any questions," she said. "Do you know where the state line is? Can you drive there?"

One part of it hit me. Like a log in a log-jam turning around and hitting another butt-end to. Me—the lease! Me—the lease on the dome! Me, the underdog, the pariah, the outcast, the one booted clean off the lot! It was being offered to me! The lease that O. P. MacIntyre had estimated at half a million dollars, was to be mine!

"Why, look," I said, "if you want me to have the lease, all you have to do is offer it to me!"

"I said, can you drive there?"

You couldn't take it in. You couldn't get your mind around it. No one could. Even sober I didn't think I could get my mind around it. Thoughts were going through my mind, roaring like express trains, loaded with significance. I would get hold of one and then there would be a big lag, a daze.

"Yes," I said.

The night went by us, chunks of blackness, strips of moonlight.

Her body made a stiff V, her feet braced against the floorboard, her back further than ever from the seat-back, and her head turned out the window. The very sight and nearness of her rushed crosswise across my thoughts. It made me afraid to talk. My tongue plugged in my throat. I was afraid to say anything, to do anything, even to look at her, for fear I might break this, shatter it like an eggshell, wake us up from the dream.

I must have been going faster. The gravel sounded like a bombardment. A moth splashed on the windshield in front of her and she recoiled as if been shot.

Then it all slumped out of me. My mind collapsed like a paper balloon. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was just one of those spaces in my mind, a longer space. But it seemed to be something else. There seemed to be something I was missing, something I ought to know, something that was going by me entirely. I tried to get it. It was there. It was there in my mind, if I could only see it. I kept muffing it completely, as though I was trying to pick up a needle with boxing gloves.

I don't know whether that drive lasted ten minutes or half an hour, I do know we didn't say anything. We sat there like a couple of lengths of wood and the splash where the moth had been dried up. Then there was pavement under us and a string of lights on the highway and a lot of signs. The signs said *Justice of the Peace,* and *Marriage Without Delay,* and *Marriage Licenses.*

We got out and went into a house. There was a little office in front with a counter across it. On the counter was a big tin noisy alarm clock. The clock said a minute to eleven. Behind the counter, with his feet on an unlighted stove, was a man with spectacles shoved back on his bald head. He was dozing in a rocker.

He came awake and pulled the spectacles down on his nose.

"Hello, Mr. Garfield," she said, "don't you remember me? I was here with Hattie Kane the night she got married. We're eloping."

"Oh, yes," he said, and got up. "Well, well. Dear me."

"Jim," she said to me, "you can get the ring from Mr. Garfield."

"Sure," he said, "right back here."

We went back through the office into a parlor and he showed me an assortment of rings. We came back and Val was standing at the counter as she had been. The big clock said a quarter after ten.

I didn't get it.

Mr. Garfield took out a blank marriage license and asked us some questions. He wrote our names on it. I watched his square hand write them: James R. Keith, and Valerie Lester.

She said to him: "Would you mind entering the time on it, Mr. Garfield?"

"Surely," he said, and took out a big silver watch like a potato. He wrote down the time, six minutes after eleven.

Then he had his coat on and we were standing before him and he was saying the ceremony. We were being married. Val Lester and I. It didn't mean anything. We were just a lot of paper dolls. His voice had a deep drone and we said "Yes," and

"Yes," and "I do." We were holding each other's hand, and I saw on the cuff of her sleeve a stain of blood, and a little streak of blood on her wrist.

Still I didn't tumble.

CHAPTER 4

WE DROVE to a town a few miles away, where there was a sleepy little hotel. We took a couple of connecting rooms in the hotel and she locked the door between us. I sat in my room and looked at the connecting door.

I could hear her, walking, walking, up and down, now on the rug, now off it, on the other side.

I went in and turned on the shower. They must have had deep artesian wells in that town. The water was so cold it was almost blue. I got out of my clothes and stood under it until my teeth chattered and part of the fog crawled out of my brain.

I came back and dressed, down to my shoes, and when I picked up my shoes I stood with them hanging from my hand staring at the floor. I walked over to the window in my stocking feet and sat down looking out.

I began to get it.

I put on my shoes and went out of the room, down the stairs, out of the hotel to my car. I drove back the way we had come. The night was very black and silent now, and I met no one on the road. Finally I saw the magnolia trees, and the moonlight touching the tops of the colonial pillars that needed a coat of paint. Behind the moonlight the house was dark and still. I went on past it, past the gleam of Little Cat Lake, to the mouth of the plantation road.

I stopped at the mouth of the road.

I walked down it, and the turf was springy and spongy under me, and the tangle of trees and growth went up in an indistinct wall on either side. I could hear the frogs jump away from me, and land with little plops in the shallow ditch to my left. The dark was heavy and sultry, with a kind of layer of damp coolness under it, spreading out from Little Cat Lake.

I came on Beau Burr lying on his back by the roadside.

I bent down and looked at him.

He still wore his riding boots and his tweed coat and his orange scarf and his boutonniere of violets. One leg was perfectly straight and the other knee was cocked up, and under it was a straight-handled parasol whose flowered top was broken near the tip. A corner of the orange scarf was over his shoulder, as I had seen it when he rode the black gelding away from me. His face was pale, sharpcut and handsome, and his eyes still had that sullen, direct look. His tweed coat was thrown back on the right side, and high up in the expanse of shirtfront, on that side, was a stain of blood and a bullet hole. The bullet had gone in on the diagonal, and must have touched his heart.

The turf was trampled a little, and there were some scuffs and heel marks, as though there might have been a short struggle. They were not deep, and before morning the turf would have straightened up to remove them.

My eyes went further through the yellow grass, and I saw the small silver-mounted revolver that Colonel Higgins, in the Lester home, had taken out and put on the table.

The night noises started up again. They began all at once, trillings and chirpings, from tree-toads, crickets, frogs. There were little lisping sounds, and deep, chunk-chunks, and, from the direction of Little Cat Lake, an occasional small dip and splash. Now that I looked through the copse I could see Beau's car. It was a coupe, the turtle-back to me, and as I walked to it I could see the two swerving loops of tracks where he had pulled off the road.

I walked back from it and two sets of imprints were before me in the road. They were of his big boots and her small ones, walking toward the crescent of turf.

I stooped down and picked up the gun. It was an old model, well worn, a .32 on a very small frame. The cylinder came out hard, for it had not been used in a long time. One shot had been fired from it. Just one.

I crouched on my heels with the gun in my hand and my mouth was very dry. There was no fog at all in my brain any more. I kept seeing her boots, gleaming in the light of my headlights, running down the shoulder just outside the mouth of the plantation road. Whatever the argument, the quarrel had been, she had stood here,

not a yard from him. She must have tried to catch him, tried to stop him from falling. That was where she got that blood on her cuff. I kept seeing her face, as she had faced me under the chandelier, the wild hot blood of the Lesters leaping in her eyes. I thought of all the tales I had heard about the Lesters.

I put the gun in my pocket and walked out the plantation road to my car. I drove back through the night to the hotel. Still I didn't meet a soul. I might have been the only person alive in the world.

I came into the sleepy little hotel, up the stairs to my room, and tapped on the connecting door. Her feet stopped walking and she came over and unlocked it. I pushed the gun through.

"You forgot this," I said.

I HAD smoked two or three cigarettes at the window when the door opened and she came in. I couldn't see much of her, for the room was dark, only the oval of her face, and the outline of her body, rigid and straight as a blade.

"You married me," I said, "so as to give yourself an alibi. There were a good many angles to it. If you could have fixed that clock, over at Mr. Garfield's, and got him to write that time down, then you couldn't have done it. He would have written a quarter after ten on the license, approximately the time Beau was shot. You couldn't have been with him on the plantation road at a quarter after ten, for you would have been twenty miles away being married. Too bad he used his watch."

She swallowed, and I could hear that sound in the darkness, and nothing more.

"More than that," I said, "if the time angle had worked, it would have looked like cause and effect. Our marriage would have been the cause, Beau's death the effect. Because he heard you were running away with me, he would have shot himself."

A floorboard creaked between us. It was not from her movement, for she made no movement; I could see the set of her shoulders, squared against the door, the strained erectness of her body, the patch of blouse at the neck of her jacket, white as her face.

"But mainly," I said, "you thought that as your husband I couldn't testify against you. You thought that I could never tell, in any court of law, that I had met you running up out of the plantation road."

That one swallow was the only sound she made. Now there was just darkness, and our two bodies confronting each other.

"I'll tell you about it," she said.

Her voice was low, and clear as mine; it did not struggle, or strain, or have any tension or effort in it; as though there were no effort left.

"I didn't think of all those things," she said. "Maybe I thought of some of them. I thought about your not testifying if you were my husband. I thought of the clock when I saw it. I did shoot him."

The window curtain blew in and touched my hand. The moonlight entered under the gap, and made a vague traveling patch on the floor, and that touch and that patch seemed to be the things that were living in the room, not us.

"After Aunt Ellen and Colonel Higgins went to the movies," she said, "I was alone in the house. I heard the sound of a car down on the plantation road, and it stopped. I thought it was you fellows, and I took the gun and went down there. But it was Beau, and he was standing with something he had picked up. 'I just found Miss Ellen's parasol,' he said, 'I guess she must have dropped it. Val, I want to talk to you.'

"He was very excited and I realized he was drunk. At first he said he was looking for you and then he said he wanted another power of attorney. I didn't listen much to what he said, because I remembered what you said about burning the power of attorney, and it began to dawn on me that you were right.

"I faced him up with it. We both got frightfully angry. I don't know what he said. I don't know what I said. All at once, because he's like a child when he's drunk, he admitted everything. I threw the ring at him and took the gun and ordered him off the plantation.

"He was in such a drunken rage, maybe at having admitted what he had, that he hit me with the parasol. He hit me over the head and half-stunned me. The gun went off in my hand. He fell forward on me and I tried to catch hold of him and he slipped through my arms. He fell down on the ground. He was dead."

Her voice stopped talking and there was only the darkness and the moving patch of light. I could hear the sound of our breathing, first hers, then mine, both the only sounds in the room, and neither very loud.

The wind blew the curtains harder, and parted them, and the light fell on her face for an instant. I looked in her face for that instant, and she looked in mine. Her eyes were wide, and fixed, and their blackness seemed to fill the entire sockets, as though they had no pupils. Her eyes said to me that she had done this, that she had tried to use me, and that she had failed, and that now she was at the end of her rope; and that she was going to go on standing there stiff and upright as long as I cared to face her.

My own voice sounded harsh and flat.

"Was anyone else around?"

"No one," she said. "No one was around."

"It couldn't have been any other way?" I said. "He didn't grab hold of the gun, struggle with you, turn it on himself? There wasn't some other way it could have happened?"

"No other way," she said. "That's the way it happened. I shot him. I killed him."

When I turned around she was gone.

I WENT down out of the hotel and drove away. I opened the windshield and let the night air blow in my face, and I thought of many things. I thought of that forty acres of bottom land, with the dome under it, and how I had sweated and not slept nights over it, and slave-driven my crew to find it. I thought of the heat, and the wedged bundle of dynamite sticks, and Buck's sweating face, and the sound of her quirt slapping against her boot, and the roan mare and the black gelding.

I thought of the two of them riding away in the sunset, and Tyce Burr's face going sideways with his gun, and his mouth sagging open with the wad of gum on his tongue, and Mis' Ellen's gentle scared eyes, and the way the magnolias smelled under the moon. I thought of O. P. MacIntyre's hoarse voice over the phone, and how the world had fallen around me like a wall of bricks.

I thought of how I had sat in the deserted bar, waiting for the Burr brothers, and drinking rye whiskey. I thought of the boys coming in, and how they had said "Hello," and walked by, and how they had wrecked the Burr office. I thought of myself driving out of town like a bat out of hell, with only one thought in mind, to meet the two brothers face to face.

I thought how the lease on the dome was mine, and that only I had the oil rights, only I could put a well down, only I could get any oil out of it. I thought how, besides the lease, I was part owner of the plantation, now, and actually owned some of that ground I had kicked up with my foot and figured to be worth its weight in eighteen-karat gold.

And none of these things, not one, the anger, the fury, the turmoil of discovery, the crawling painfully up top and getting knocked flat on my back, the commotion, the triumph, the trickery and connivance, meant anything more than that splash on the windshield that had once been a moth.

The whiskey was beginning to come back.

She had killed him. She had shot him. There was no way out of it. There wasn't anything to be done about it. It didn't matter that she didn't intend it, that it was an accident, that she was half-stunned when she pulled the trigger. There wasn't any way to hide the fact or hide from it.

Now, while there was only the darkness and the tree-frogs out there, he was hidden, but in the morning when the guests began to arrive for the wedding, he would be found.

She had killed him. A tale like hers you might tell to somebody; you couldn't tell it in this county. In this county everyone knew the Lesters, knew all the tales about them, believed more; and trying to tell any one of them that a Lester in a rage with a gun in his hand ever shot anybody by accident was like telling them cotton grew on oak trees.

You might find some people in the world who would believe her, but not the twelve people she was going to have to face, the twelve she was going to have to tell her story to.

I got out of my car at the plantation road.

I walked down it, and the indistinct darkness went up on either side, and the frogs jumped away from me, and again I found Beau Burr.

He lay just as he had, one knee still cocked a little over the parasol, his tweed coat open on the right side, and his eyes still looking, sullen and direct, at the tree-tops.

I looked at him, with my hands hanging between my knees, and felt no emotion toward him, no revulsion, no horror, no anger, no pity, nothing. I felt that the only thing that had meaning was not this figure before me, but the ugliness he had left behind him, like the blight on the yellow grass, and that blight was not going to disappear when morning came and grass straightened up and felt the rays of the sun again.

I thought that the worst thing she had done was to get the time written down on the marriage license. That was a plain give-away. There was absolutely no reason for anyone wanting to have the time of the ceremony entered on a marriage license, unless it was for some reason that had nothing to do with marriage. Unless the marriage were a front, a blind, a screen hastily erected to cover something else. And at some time or another Mr. Garfield would find his clock was three-quarters of an hour slow. It was all so clear, so transparent.

I drew out the parasol and saw, in its broken top, where some strands of her black hair were tangled. I pulled them out, one by one, and held them in my hand.

Since there was no way out of it, there was no way out of it. That is to say, there was only one way out of it.

I wound the strands of hair around my fingers and watched them curl and whip, live and blue-black, against my hand. Since there was nothing to be done from her side, there was only something to be done from his side.

I watched the black strands slip from my fingers in the moonlight and knew why I had come here. If there was no body, there was no crime.

I had about four hours until dawn.

I walked over the spongy turf through the trees in the direction of Little Cat Lake. The trees grew thicker and more tangled, but I didn't collide with a bough, and though the water began to seep through my shoes, and the roots were hidden under a leafy scum, I didn't slip or stumble. Now the water was over my shoetops, and the hyacinths began to tangle my legs, and the moss reached down from the low branches and trailed its beards across my face.

Ahead I could see the gleam of deep water, and I was fairly certain that the rowboat I had seen the two field hands using to catch garfish must be moored on this side. The gleam grew brighter, and I could see the trees silhouetted against it, and the cypress knees standing up stiff and rigid between them like blunt bayonets. The water reached to my thighs, and a mass of hyacinths was piled up to my chest, and the branches were like a roof above me, but all at once the trees fell off in the long curving round of the lake.

I looked to my left, and there, not a hundred feet from me, was the boat. I could see the flat of its oars over the stern, and the line of rope thrown between a split fork of cypress, and the heavy chunk of concrete used for an anchor hanging half out of the water, barely visible.

Behind it I saw that a boatway had been cut through the hyacinths out to deep water. I looked out at that deep water, across a scattering of cypress knees like a hedge of bayonets, and saw it lie huge and round, a gleaming cup, collared by hyacinths, and walled in by the blackness of trees.

I turned and came back to the gravel road. I got in my car and drove in the direction of town. I kept on the left side of the road, and watched for a thicket of brambles.

I knew it in daylight, but would have to watch carefully for it now, a huge thicket overhanging the road. It was two or three miles down, where there was a three-railed fence and a gap in the fence; a gap where Buck came in and out each morning with his day's supply.

Finally I saw it, and switched off my lights, and pulled through the gap. I drove about fifty yards, the brambles rubbing the car on both sides with harsh sound. Then the brambles opened up in a spoonbowl of clearing and I stopped before the grey bulk of our dynamite magazine. Since we could not store our dynamite in any inhabited place, we carried our storage place with us, and this was it, a gable-roofed trailer mounted on an automobile chassis. It was squat and windowless, made of armor plate, with a chain going from its wheels around the bole of a tree, secure here in the middle of the thicket with no one within a mile.

I took out my keys, that tomorrow I would relinquish to the new chief, and opened the steel door. The hot mustiness of afternoon came out, and I stood on the sloping iron tongue where Buck's helper had scraped bayou mud off his feet, and fished around on the floor for Buck's flashlight. I found it, stepped inside, swung the door to.

THERE were fifteen or eighteen wooden boxes of dynamite piled up in the back, almost a thousand pounds. Beside the pile was an opened box, and I stooped beside it. It was half full of broken pieces, odds and ends of sticks he had not used. I picked up a stick-end, squeezed the capsule of tough brown paper, and crumbled the grainy, damp, mealy contents between my thumb and finger. I would want none of this.

Around me on the walls hung hanks, rolls, and reels of wire, used and unused, with one new reel that was still unwrapped from its paper covering. The bright red, box-like apparatus alongside me, with the handle upthrust from its middle, was his blaster. There was a smaller blaster there too, small enough to hold in one hand and operate by twirling a handle like the key of an alarm clock.

It would fit in my pocket, but it was not absolutely sure. I put my thumb and finger across the terminals of the big blaster, and pushed the handle down, to be sure it was in working order and generating a current, and not some blaster he had discarded.

Across from me, in a corner by itself, was a long narrow plywood box bottomed with felt. This was his cap box, that contained the blasting caps for detonating the dynamite. Inside it was lined with thicker felt, for an ordinary sharp jar might explode the caps. Each cap was a small copper tube, smaller around than a pencil and about as long as my thumb, with two wires coming out the end. Inside the copper tube was fulminate of mercury, and when a current, generated by the blaster, passed through the wires into the cap, the fulminate of mercury exploded. The wire leads coming out of these caps were forty feet long, and not rolled up or wound, but folded up accordion-wise behind the cap. This was so the wire leads could be extended with a single motion, and there would be no chance of jarring the cap by a snag or tangle in unwinding wire.

I took the cap box, and the big blaster, and Buck's tin tool-kit, to my car. I took all the wire, for it was going to need a good deal of wire. I came back and broke in the top of a new box of dynamite.

I looked at the rows of long brown cylinders, ranked in their sawdust bed. Fifty pounds were in this box, twenty sticks, each stick weighing two and a half pounds.

Fifty pounds would cause complete demolition, but the object was obliteration. I broke off the top of another box and set it, topless, by the first. I gave a last look around. Rubber tape, pliers, awl, knife, were in the tool-kit. I could think of nothing I had forgotten. I carried both boxes of dynamite to my car, locked up the magazine, and drove back to the yellow patch of turf.

His car, with its turtle back toward me through the trees, was a problem that stumped me. I could not drive it away, and my own car too; and I could not drive it in the lake. I backed it out, ran it about a hundred yards down the gravel, and nosed it into the first shelter of trees. I would cut here, when I had finished, take it instead of my own, drive it to town and leave it.

My preparations had already taken me forty-five minutes.

I crouched on my heels, working like a beaver, making half-hitches close together in a length of wire, and inserting a stock of dynamite in every half-hitch. When I had finished I had something like a gigantic cartridge belt. This I lashed around Beau, and when I made the ends fast, my fingers touched the boutonniere of violets.

For some reason, possibly because I could not fancy this happening to him with flowers in his buttonhole, I took the flowers out. When I made the second belt fast I lashed the parasol in beneath it. I repeated the process, belt after belt, over his whole body. I kept wiping sweat out of my eyes and thinking about an accident that had happened to a shooting crew like ours up in Oklahoma.

Someone had got careless with caps around the dynamite truck while a helper was sleeping on the boxes in back. They never found anything belonging to the helper but the top joint of his thumb. If care

could do it, I would do as well by Beau. The beds of hyacinths would probably come loose and make the lake impassable. By the time anyone could get in there the currents would have carried away anything so large as the top joint of a thumb.

When I finished he was encased in sticks of dynamite like an ungainly suit of armor.

There was no change in the dark, or the sky, but I could feel the change in the air. The night was beginning that imperceptible turn toward morning.

Now, when I was at the stage of the business when I had to be most deliberate, most careful, because I knew the whiskey was making me overconfident, I had to hurry. I stripped off everything but my soaked trousers and carried the cap box, the tool-kit, the wire, to the boat.

I could not pull the boat any closer inshore, for the hyacinths would have made it impossible for me to row out again.

My second trip was a terrible affair. I reeled with my huge, unwieldy burden like some figure in a nightmare. Muck, water, moss, branches, closed in on me, creepers, bushes, fought me, slashed me, hyacinths grabbed hold of me, slashed me, hyacinths grabbed hold of me, the ooze sucked down my feet under my tremendous load halfway to my knees. I could not walk, I could only drag one foot out of the sucking water and fall toward the next tree. Once a bough struck me such a terrific blow on the head I would have fallen flat backward had I not wedged between two huge upthrust cypress knees.

When I finally got him to the boat I had to hang on to the side and pant rasping sobs that cut across the night and filled the whole end of the lake with sound.

I climbed in and pulled down the boatway through the hyacinths.

A snake swam for a moment alongside, its triangular head going like a pendulum, the ripples moving in zig-zagging waves behind.

When I got out beyond the hyacinths I began to test for bottom. Already it was beyond the reach of my oar, but I pulled out another hundred yards. I tested here with the chunk of concrete and a length of wire, and it was thirty-two feet.

My cut and bleeding feet left red stains on the thwarts as I scrambled back to the stern.

I opened the cap box, took out one of the copper tubes with its accordion pleats of wire. From Buck's tool-kit I took out a long brass awl. With the awl I pierced a deep hole in the soft side of a dynamite stick, inserted the cap in the hole. I took a hitch around the stick to hold the cap in place, then another hitch, so that the strain, when I played the wire out, would come on the wire, not on the cap. One cap would be sufficient to detonate the mass of dynamite, but to make sure, I capped two sticks.

I made the chunk of concrete fast to the harness around him and edged him overboard.

For one horrible moment I thought the sawdust composition in the dynamite sticks was going to make him buoyant, but then he slid down, without a sound, without a ripple, into the depths of the black water.

I sat huddled, peering overside, watching the greasy film from the dynamite spread over the water, a few bubbles rise and break, playing out the accordion pleats of the cap wires through my hands. Either the boat had moved or he settled into a hole, for when he came to rest there was less than a foot of cap wire left in my hands.

I took a small testing galvanometer from the tool-kit and tested the cap wires. They tested perfectly.

It was done.

It was done, but I was going to have to splice more wire to the cap wires, almost at water level. The cap wires were waterproof, and so was the new reel of wire I meant to stretch ashore, but the splice between them had to be waterproofed.

I used nearly half a roll of tape on that splice. Water would soak through it after a space, but not in the short time I was going to need. I took a hitch of the new reel of wire around the oarlock of the boat. I would leave the boat here, to help hold the splice out of water.

I drove in and swam for the shore with my reel of wire. It was lucky the scattering of cypress knees came out as far as they did, for the wire pulled, bucked, turned me around in the water, nearly strangled me. When I made the first cypress knee I grabbed it, hooked a twist of wire around it, struck out for the next. I laid it from cypress knee to cypress knee, and when I got in wading depth, from tree to tree out of the water.

I led my wire back to the yellow patch where there was now only the blaster.

I pulled on my clothes, shoved my torn feet in my shoes, dried off my hands on moss, and attached the wire to the blaster terminals. Now all I had to do was shove down the blaster handle, and the current generated in the blaster would go out through the cap wires, discharge the fulminate of mercury, detonate the dynamite. There would be a wild heave of waters, savage, rolling, an uproaring maelstrom, a cascade, a column of lashing black and white spume, falling back on itself like thunder . . . and that was all.

I saw a dead branch overhead that would come down and brain me. I reached up and broke it off, and after that noise something else moved at the edge of the plantation road.

A voice spoke behind me.

"Well, son," it said. "What are you doing out here?"

CHAPTER 5

IN THE rim of moonlight at the edge of the copse, the only light now in the patch, stood the sheriff. I could see his bedraggled mop of moustache, making a patch of blackness on his face. His head jutted out, angular and pale, between the trees, the light making sharp angles of his cheekbones; there was that tight-buttoned coat, like a deacon's; there were his big bony hands parting the thicket to look through.

I stood, with my head over my shoulder, and stared at him. Not a thought, not a word, took shape, rose up, pierced into my mind. My head, wrenched round to look at him, might have twisted off the nerve-trunks between mind and body. I was like a block of wood.

"What you doing down there?" he said.

I heard the branches crack as he moved into the yellow space of turf. In that brain-blockage that was on me, my movement was automatic; you couldn't call it presence of mind; I dropped the dead branch over the blaster.

"Is Beau with you?"

"Beau?" I said stupidly.

He was standing not four feet from me in the yellow patch. I could see the lanky lines of his body, the gleam of a metal pencil clipped in his breast pocket, the sheen of his celluloid collar, the birdlike thrusts of his bony head, peering around. As yet he hadn't seen the blaster. Maybe his eyes weren't as accustomed to the darkness as mine.

"Yes," he said. "I found his car out there on the gravel road. There was nobody in it, so I got out to look around."

I was trying to get hold of my breathing. So that was how he had come up on me without my knowledge. When I was swimming ashore, he was driving down the gravel road; when I climbed out, he had stopped to look at Beau's car.

It was incredible, the blaster was four feet from him and he didn't see it.

"What's been going on here?" he said. "The ground's all scuffed up. The two of you didn't have a fight?"

He took a flashlight from his pocket and sprayed its beam through the trees. I could feel a constriction in my scalp as if it were frozen. The light lanced here, there, through the copse, once not two feet from the extended wire.

It couldn't go on. It couldn't. He was going to splash the blaster with his flashlight. He flashed it on me.

"Why, you're all wet!" he said. "What you been up to?"

The light, moving between my legs, would splash bright red on the blaster.

"Look here," he said. "Beau's disappeared. He's not been home, and nobody knows where he is. Now what's his car doing there, and you here?"

What saved me then was a rumbling rattle on the road, the twin beams of passing headlights. The sheriff turned to stare at them. It was a bus, lumbering toward town.

"Look!" I said. "Over there! Something's moving over there!"

"What's that?"

He swung his beam where I pointed, started that way. I turned, squatted, shoved down the blaster handle. Nothing happened. During the time we had stood there the water had soaked into my splice, short-circuited the current.

"What are you doing there?" he said.

His flashlight beam caught me full, silhouetted me, the blaster in my hands.

I stayed where I was. The jig was up. There was nothing I could do. His feet

were making long strides toward me. The sound that came out of my mouth then I did not recognize. It didn't come from me. It was nothing I reached for, grabbed out of thin air. Maybe it was the whiskey. It was a kind of crazy laugh.

"Why shouldn't a man celebrate," I burst out, "when he's just been married?"

That brought him up. Almost in midstride. He stood staring at me over his mop of moustache.

"Married?" he said. "What's that?"

"Married! Yes! Married! To Val Lester! We ran away! We eloped! We just got married! Nothing wrong with a man making a little noise, a little racket, a little celebration, is there? On his own land?"

He didn't seem to get this part. Only the first part held him. He actually sat back on his heels.

"You . . . and Val Lester?"

The whole tone of his voice had changed. Even the attitude of his body had changed. It was impossible, it was incomprehensible, but this mad grab out of nowhere, this crack-brained subterfuge, seemed to be going over.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said.

He pushed his hat back. He pulled a blade of yellow grass and put it between his teeth.

"Not that I ever thought she'd marry him," he said. "But you! Well, well. Only reason she ever got engaged to him was, his pappy and her pappy was such friends. Her pappy wanted 'em plighted before he died."

This meant nothing to me but so many words. If I could get him out! Get him out some way, get rid of him for five minutes, four minutes, I could repair the splice. He pulled another blade of grass, picked something up with it. He stared at it. He turned his flashlight on it. "What's this?" he said.

He was turning something round in the ray of light. Round, and purple. It was the compact circle of violets of Beau's boutonniere.

His eyes came up to mine. I could see his face, slowly, almost muscle by muscle, freeze into immobility. How long his eyes held mine like that I do not know.

"Oh," he said. "So he was here."

He got up. I could almost feel, behind his unmoving eyes, the shifts, flashes, swoops of his thought process, things falling into lattern, realizations meshing together.

"Beau," he said. The words were like pointers, like cogs in the process. "The fight. You . . ." His eyes went from me to the blaster, to the wire, out along the wire in the direction of Little Cat Lake.

"So that's where he is," he said.

We were facing each other. It was a moment when nothing happened, nothing had any meaning, like a space of dead air, in which I registered nothing. We kept looking at each other through that dead space. I didn't even hear the sound of steps, though they must have been quick, and sharp, running, most like, and there was probably even the snap of branches. It was the sheriff who turned and swung his light on Val.

There she stood, the light snarled like fireflies in her hair, her face the even creaminess of a magnolia flower, her eyes starkly etched, from lid to lid, that intense, unvarying, enormous black.

How she had come there I had no idea. Maybe she came on the bus.

The sheriff made no word of greeting. He shot his voice at her, harsh and edged.

"Is that right, you've married this fellow?"

She nodded. Her slim figure, like a boy's, seemed caught in arrested motion. Her hair was a tumbled mass that flared on her shoulders; her hand was at her throat. Her eyes were on the ground. I could see the stun, the pallor, the absolute blankness creeping over her face.

"This fellow's met Beau," said the sheriff. "They've had a fight, and he's killed him, and sunk him out there in the lake, and is going to blow him to hell. That's the man you've married."

We looked at each other across a grey space in which everything seemed to shatter, and collapse, and fall around us. Her hand went away from her throat and my ring with it.

Her voice was low and clear as it had been in the hotel room.

"No, Sheriff," she said. "He didn't kill Beau. He did this trying . . . to cover up for me. It was Beau and I who had the quarrel. Right here. He hit me with a parasol. I was holding a gun on him. It went off in my hand. I killed him."

The wind blew a strand of hair across her

face. She brushed it back. In that grey space that was everywhere, that waste of weariness and futility, I was glad, I don't know why, since nothing mattered any more, that she held herself straight as a rapier.

She took the small silver-mounted revolver out of her pocket and handed it to him.

"Here's the gun," she said.

IT TOOK them until broad daylight to get the body up. By that time the news had spread like wildfire, and most of the town was out there. They came in groups, milling around, exclaiming among the trees, calling to their neighbors, running back to greet new-comers.

The excitement rang in the glade like a grotesque carnival sound. None came too close, for the prospect of a hundred pounds of dynamite going off somewhere between here and shore kept them well out of the yellow patch across the road.

They were just weariness, and a gabbling array of meaningless masks, to me. Nothing, of all the events of the night, seemed more nightmarish, unreal, than this noisy flourish at the end.

In one group I caught a glimpse of Tyce Burr. There was the stencil of beard on his face, more like a false face than ever, since he hadn't shaved; and for once that wide mouth in his bullet head was not twisting up and down and sideways with gum. There, scurrying behind him, more than ever like an oppossum, was Gassendi, fat and roly-poly in his tight brown suit. They registered on me no more than the redbirds flitting from bough to bough.

I sat with my back against a tree and broke pieces of rotten wood. It was the same branch I had dropped over the blaster. The sun was hot and horizontal through the trees and headache hammered at the back of my eyes. Through the tangle of cypress boughs and festoons of moss came the sound of men's voices from Little Cat Lake. The glare stabbed my eyes and the voices came distorted across the water.

Where Val was I did not know. Somewhere out of all this, with Mis' Ellen and Colonel Higgins, I hoped. The few minutes of conversation I had had with her went dully through my mind. Just a few minutes, while the sheriff went up to the house to telephone, while the first streaks of day crept in across Little Cat Lake.

I had tried to get her to let me take it for her. I had told her her case was hopeless, that nobody would believe it was an accident, that the wild, firebrand reputation of the Lesters was enough to condemn her, that she didn't have a chance, that there was no way out for her. I told her she couldn't stand the prison sentence; I was a man, I could take it. I told her we could pass off what she told the sheriff as a moment of hysteria, an effort to protect me; that I was sure I could bring the sheriff around.

I told her other things, things I could not think of now, that pounded out of me then. I told her I was the natural suspect, that everybody knew I had been looking for the Burrs, in a red rage, all night. That there before everyone was the proof I had tried to destroy his body, that the whole role was made and ready for me, all I had to do was step into it. That it would be called manslaughter, killing in a fight, that my sentence would be no longer than hers.

She had just stood there and shook her head. She knew, now, that the marriage had been no convenience on my part, no mere bargain entered into to get the oil lease. That was, I think, the only change I saw in her numb, pale face, the realization of that, deep in those fixed black eyes. She knew, now, what I felt for her.

I sat breaking pieces of rotten wood. The voices kept coming through the festoons of moss. The sun kept glaring. My mind was prone, inert; the headache hammered in emptiness. Things were patchy, disjointed. Once Colonel Higgins, with his grey goatee jutting out over his pouter-pigeon chest, was before me.

"Allow me," he said, "to give you my personal thanks."

I went on dropping pieces of wood. A dumpy, bald-headed man pushed through the crowd, brushed by me, puffing, perspiring, carrying a squat leather bag. This must be the coroner. By this time the men had got the body through the trees and cut it out of its harness. The coroner knelt down, and I could see the gleam of his bald head above those extended boots.

There was a space while the coroner examined the body. The crowd, closed in now around the yellow patch, craned and stared.

"The bullet killed him, all right," said the coroner. "It entered a little to the right of the sternum, touched the heart on a diagonal, hit the scapular ridge, and lodged here behind his armpit."

He mopped his bald head with a bandanna.

"One shot?" asked the sheriff.

"Just one shot," said the coroner. "I'll have the bullet for you in a minute."

I turned my head and looked between the trees. That curve of purple in the bottom lands was the hyacinth-choked bayou. Out there had been a beginning, a hope, a future. I cupped my eyes from the flare and looked at nothing.

"It's a .38," said the coroner.

I think that was the first thing that shocked any kind of organization back to my mind.

"A .38!" The sheriff came up on his heels. "Why, this gun's a .32!"

"Look for yourself," said the coroner. "Here, wait a minute! There's something smeared on the back of this. A gummy—Why, it's tobacco! A thick paste of it, like you'd get from stewing old cigars!"

That frozen blankness exploded like a starshell. My mind was reaching, clutching, grabbing at recollections, diving into the past, trying to fix that memory. Stewing old cigars! Who had said that? Where had I heard that before? Who . . .

The coroner had wheeled. I must have shouted at him.

"That's what I said," he said. "Stewing old cigars, to get nicotine! This bullet's been poisoned. Nicotine's a deadly poison inside the body."

I tried to stave everything else off, seize this one recollection. It was like clutching one thread of current in a maelstrom.

Then I had it in a streak of piling thoughts, like a sluice, opening. The creaky wooden steps. Yesterday afternoon. Buck and I walking up them. The glass doors of the law office. Buck nudging my elbow. The two of us looking in at Tyce Burr and Gassendi, Gassendi, in the tight little brown suit, taking a tin box out of his pocket, the kind typewriter ribbons come in. Gassendi, in his shrilled little voice, saying: "Do you see this gumbo? I made it myself by stewing old cigars."

I felt my jaw jerk in against my neck.

"Wait a minute!" I said.

THEY were staring at me agape. I must have stood there like a blind man. There was something else. Something else. My mind was clawing at it. What was it made Buck nudge my elbow? What had made us laugh, made us stop in the first place? Gassendi and the umbrella! Gassendi opening and closing an umbrella! Opening and closing it, time after time, pointing it at the floor, the walls, the ceiling!

"The umbrella!" I said. "The umbrella! *The parasol!*"

There were two blank, stupefied faces—the egg-bald head of the coroner, the moustache-mopped face of the sheriff.

"Don't you see what he was doing? Don't you realize what he was doing? He was demonstrating with an umbrella. He was showing you always point the handle at yourself! He was saying, 'No matter how you open it, you always point the handle at yourself!"

I took a couple of lunging steps.

"Where is it?" I said. "Give it to me! The parasol! Where is it? I bound it in with the dynamite sticks!"

I made a plunging dive and got over to the wire harness. There it was, its flowered top bedraggled, its bamboo tip broken, its cloth a limp, soaked mass. I had it in my hands. I was shoving it under the sheriff's face.

"The handle!" I said. "The handle! He was demonstrating with the *handle* of the umbrella! It's hollow! It's open at the end! There's a metal sleeve in there! Smell it! Smell it! You can still smell the gunpowder!"

The sheriff stood there with the parasol in his hands, like a wooden image.

He didn't even look at the parasol. He cried at me:

"What are you talking about? Are you trying to tell me he was killed with this parasol?"

The coroner had his finger in the end of the handle.

"Jehoshaphat!" he said. "There's an empty shell in there!"

There was an uprush of babbling noise from the crowd. My voice pounded against it. It was harsh, hoarse. "Don't you see? It's a simple spring arrangement! The parasol shot the bullet like a gun barrel! It

is a gun barrel, under the bamboo! The parasol killed him! It was a murder tool! It was left on the plantation road on purpose! For a murder! It wasn't intended for Beau! It wasn't intended for Val! It was intended for Mis' Ellen!

The things poured through my mind as though the sweep of a knife had laid them bare. I saw the deep roots of the murder scheme. The murder that was planned, the murder that was foiled, that got the wrong victim. I saw Tyce Burr's long figure in the law office, taking the umbrella from Gassendi, hanging it on the coat rack. I heard the deep bass of voice of Tyce Burr saying: "It's good. It's good. But I prefer the Keith angle.' Of course! Of course! They would approach me first with the proposition to filch the oil holding, and if that failed, the other—the death of Mis' Ellen! What a simple, brutal scheme! They would take her parasol, fix the hollow sleeve in it, so the release of the catch, to open the parasol, would discharge the bullet through the handle! They would drop the parasol near the house, not too close, for they might be seen, but near enough so it would be found, brought in to her in the morning! With a lawn wedding, when she went out to look over the grounds, she would be killed! There would be no follow up. How could three be? Who could trace anything from a parasol found lying on the ground?

The death of Mis' Ellen! There would be no marriage! There would be no Colonel Higgins in the picture, marrying a share of the holding, taking charge, taking everything out of their hands! The plantation would revert to Val, the sole heir of Mis' Ellen. Beau would marry her, and they would get the *whole* property!

The coroner was shouting something at me. I didn't hear him. I was again seeing the gum-chewing face of Tyce Burr, back there in his office, saying in his deep bass: "We'll keep it from Beau. He'll blab anything when he's drunk." Beau was to know nothing about it. Beau *had* known nothing about it. He went to his death still Tyce's stooge.

Words burst from me. I was hurling them alternately at the sheriff, at the coroner.

"Don't you see? It was left out here for Mis' Ellen! It would be found, brought up to her this morning! That catch, that little catch you push in to open the parasol, is the trigger-release! Good Lord, what a way to kill her! A bullet poisoned with nicotine! She wouldn't have a chance! No matter how she held it to open it, the bullet would hit some part of her body!"

"The bullet Val shot never hit Beau!" I said. "It went wild! Don't you understand? Beau didn't know about it! He didn't know a thing about it! He drove up here last night, and when he saw the parasol lying in the road, he stopped to pick it up! That was when Val came out to him! They quarreled. He was drunk; he got blind mad. He hit her with the parasol, hard enough to release the spring inside! One thing they never figured was that when you hit someone with a parasol, the handle is also pointing at yourself!"

The sheriff's moustache was going up and down. Something finally came out of the mouth below it. It was like an explosion.

"They! Who?"

"Why, Tyce Burr and Gassendi!"

Now the babbling of the crowd went up in a roar.

"What's that?" Tyce Burr came snarling up through them. "You mean to say I killed my brother?"

Gassendi shrilled in his wake. "Monstrous! Prepos—"

I could see their faces working, Tyce's berserk, glaring, behind his stenciled false-face of beard. Gassendi's like putty, his sharp little button of nose a dead white; as if frozen. I got part of what he was yelling.

". . . evidence!" he was screeching. "Supposition! No evidence! How can there be any evidence from a parasol left lying on the ground? What can connect it with any particular person?"

"That's what they intended!" I shouted at the sheriff. "That was their whole game! The parasol was simply left here, and nobody would ever know who did it! They were trying to kill Mis' Ellen! They killed Beau instead!"

TYCE BURR swung to the sheriff. His bass was a wild roar. "How long are you going to listen to this maniac? He trussed up my brother's body with dynamite, tried to blow him up in the lake! How much longer do you have to look for his murderer?"

The crowd noise dropped off, then. It was like the fall of surf.

I whirled around.

"Buck!" I said. "That sketch!"

Buck's homely face goggled at me. "Sketch! What sketch?"

"That sketch we thought was an oil well! That sketch you took out of their office!"

Buck made a grab at his pocket. He ripped out the lining with it. "Here!"

I had the paper in my hands. I almost tore it in half. I shoved it at the sheriff.

"Look at this! Do you see what this is? It's a sketch of the parasol handle! It's a cross-section of the metal tube inside! See, this spiral, wound up at the top, is a spring. This sharp-pointed thing, that looks like a drill, is a pin, a firing-pin, that the spring drives down into the percussion cap of the shell. This rim holds the shell in place."

The sheriff was riveted on the paper. Across that pause ripped Buck's voice.

"Look at their letterhead on it!"

The silence in the copse was like frozen glass. No one stirred. There must have been a hundred people with their eyes fixed on Tyce Burr's face. A change came over that face, a draining, inward change. The rage dropped out of it; it got coarse, slack, as if the muscles had lost their function.

It was Gassendi who broke that silence.

The roly-poly man reached up and jerked at his collar. His ferrety face was all the color of his sharp button of nose, now, a grey, oily, whitish color like tallow.

"I cannot shield you any longer, Tyce." His shrill voice beat the air like a mechanical tattoo. "I can no longer help you when confronted by the facts. I am obliged to tell how you approached me with the scheme, drew the sketch to show me how feasible it was."

Tyce Burr hunched his big shoulders.

"You slimy little rat," he said. "You drew that sketch yourself."

His big spatulate hand came up with one savage motion. He had a gun in it. There was a rush of movement by me. It was Buck, leaping for that extended arm. Like a smashed jigsaw, the place splashed into crazy action. People were plunging, diving.

The shot went off. Gassendi was howling, gunsmoke hung, a grey bloom, tattered suddenly, ripped by wild movement. It was a bedlam, turning into a sudden rout, with Tyce at their head. He was knifing, twisting through the trees. There was the sheriff, in front, head down, his long body going like a greyhound.

I STOOD there without moving. The hubbub swirled, stormed around me, tore at me, like a storm at a tree. The rout boiled around me, by me, past me, away. The crowd was streaming down the plantation road, bucking and swirling against a big black limousine coming up the road.

It was done. It was over. I was alone.

Alone, but for Val. She was standing eight or ten feet behind. I didn't turn around to look at her, I kept watching, in the same senseless fashion, the big limousine coming up the road.

It stopped. Someone got out. It was a portly figure with a beefy face. It was O. P. MacIntyre, the president of my company.

He was looking at people running by him. He grabbed out and got hold of somebody. It was Buck.

"What are you doing out here?" he bellowed. "Why aren't you back reporting to your new chief?"

Buck's head got down between his shoulders. Something in his expression made O. P. drop his grip. He began thrashing his arms around.

"What's this I hear about Keith killing somebody? That crazy gorilla not only double-crossed us, but used our dynamite, our equipment, to blow up the man he killed!"

Buck shoved his face into the fat face of O. P. MacIntyre.

"Too bad it couldn't have been you!" he said.

O. P. MacIntyre retreated a couple of steps, kept backing up, turned around, and for the first time saw me. His beefy face made a kind of a widespread snatch, then did a masterpiece of assembling itself.

He walked by me as if I were a lamp post, and went up to Val. He took off his hat with an elaborate gesture.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lester," he said. "Could I have a few moments of your time? Would it be possible for me to talk to you about getting an oil lease on this plantation?"

Then I felt Val's hand on my arm. There was a quiver in her voice, the first quiver in it I had ever heard.

"I don't know," she said. "You'll have to take that up with my husband."

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A FEW months ago a long, lean and rather graceful gentleman walked into the office and quietly wished to know if we wanted anything. We suggested that "anything" in its broadest definition should certainly embrace adventure and sat back to listen. Mr. Roland Wild smiled quickly and began to talk.

Although an Englishman, Mr. Wild does everything quickly, including juggling earth-spanning distances. It is easy to visualize him driving a fast car a little faster in Europe's most grueling auto race *(Race to the Sun,* September '52 *Adventure);* and easy, too, to see him moved to write the powerful story (in this issue) of the handful of rebels who challenged the armed might of Russia's Far Eastern Empire in what is undoubtedly the greatest true adventure story of 1952. For Mr. Wild has spent a lifetime racing from one revolution to another for no other purpose than to write the human story thereof.

But before you turn to *One Thousand Camp-fires to Freedom,* on page 42, let Roland Wild tell you about himself:

I've been an *Adventure* expert for some years, answering questions on the North of India and Afghanistan, and Kashmir. I picked up my knowledge about these places while on a newspaper in India, covering the Afghan revolution — which cost King Amanullah his throne—in the course of a three years' stay. Had fine practice, too, writing the official biographies of several Indian maharajas, stayed with Mahatma Gandhi for a while, and then returned to Fleet Street, London.

Among other assignments from the "Street of Adventure" were trips to Russia, India again for the Hindu-Mohammedan riots, West Africa, and finally the United States. The West African journey took me to Liberia, where I walked 200 miles through unmapped jungle to check on the slavery the League of Nations reported to be still in existence. This in the 1930's. The journey was worth it—the result was generally considered a sensational series in one of the huge-circulation London weeklies and a book.

When I first came to the United States in 1937 I covered 13,000 miles through thirty states, and returned to London to write a book, *Double-Crossing America,* and do a series of articles, broadcasts, and appear on TV on the subject. And as soon as possible after the war, I returned to America, to cover Hollywood, make a trip up the Alaska Highway, and eventually settle in New York.

The War? I was a major in Britain's Psychological Warfare Division in Germany, printing newspapers for the Germans after four years' service in bomb-crazy Britain. Last year, I was in Vienna, Paris and London, and am currently in Vancouver, Canada, for the publication of my book on that thriving city — *Nine O'clock Gun.*

CHARLES J. DOYLE, whose *Blood Sky* helped to make the January '52 issue of *Adventure* what is was—preeminently satisfactory at least to its editors—has, in the course of a varied career, been a logger, a dockwalloper, and once operated a wholesale butchery, besides having crashed some of the nation's toughest editorial sanctums with his strong men's fiction. Somewhere along the line, he has also known a good scotty dog, and at least met or been introduced to a South Seas barracuda—next slack period in business we're going to ask him about that and let you know.

Mr. Doyle writes:

Well, this is something! Today, I check through my files, and find that the first story I ever wrote in my life was rejected exactly ten years ago today. And guess who rejected it? That's right. . . .

I've had a few other rejections since then. Now I just write, and let my agent do the worrying. And since he doesn't like worrying, he manages to avoid it by selling most of the stuff I send him. He's put me into the *Satevepost* and *Argosy* a few times, and I've often wondered why he never got around to connecting me with *Adventure*.

At any rate, the writer is a native of Kingston, Ontario, and the author of three children. I haven't had any rejections along that line as yet, but my good wife says I'd better look for another editor, if I'm figuring on any more submissions. She goes on to say that if I hit *Adventure* a little oftener than once every ten years, that she might reconsider.

So . . . I wonder if I can still find that old script, dated August 21, 1941. Who knows. . . .

In the meantime, you won't want to miss *Barracuda Bait,* on page 32, this issue.

AN INTERESTING note from Reader E. W. Atties, of Boston, Massachusetts, on the functions of sailing ship crews:

Glossing over a recent copy of *Adventure*, I was interested in the article *Sails Talk*. In saying that sailing warships carried large crews to handle the sails more expeditiously in times of action, the author of this article made a slip.

Large crews were carried by sailing warships primarily to fight the ship's batteries. Take a heavy frigate of eighteen hundred, rated at forty-four guns. She would probably carry a total of fifty or fifty-two guns, as ships of that period generally carried from six to ten guns above their official ratings. On the lower or gun-deck would be thirty eighteen or twenty-four pounder guns, fifteen to each side; on quarterdeck and forecastle, she would carry guns of lighter caliber, some twenty guns to a side, either twelve pounders or twelve-eighteen- or twenty-four pounders.

Each gun on the lower deck would require from seven to eight men to handle it; forecastle and quarterdeck guns would need four, five, or six men apiece. To work a broadside would need from one hundred and forty-five to one hundred and sixty-five men, not to speak of the powder monkeys to keep the guns supplied with powder from the magazines, officers to oversee the different divisions, etc. Then some fifty seamen, at least, would be needed to handle the sails. Actually, a forty-four gun frigate would carry from three hundred and fifty to four hundred men in her crew, officers included. A ship-of-the-line of seventy-four guns would have a crew of six hundred or seven hundred men; a three-decker of one hundred guns, from eight hundred to nine hundred men.

I think an article on the various ratings of sailing ships-of-war would be of interest to readers of *Adventure*. There were the brigs-of-war, for example, two-masted square-rigged vessels carrying from twelve to sixteen guns. Then came the corvettes, or sloops-of-war, flush-decked vessels carrying from eighteen to twenty-four guns on the upper deck. Then would come the frigates—light frigates of thirty-two to thirty-six guns, and heavy frigates of forty-four guns. After these would come the ships-of-the-line, two- and three-decked vessels carrying from sixty to seventy-four to ninety, ninety-eight, and one hundred guns each.

Now, I would be much obliged for some information on the following points:

In 1807, while lying in an American port, the U. S. frigate *Chesapeake* was fired into by the British frigate *Leopard* which then sent an armed crew to the *Chesapeake* and took out some four men claimed as deserters from the British Navy. What was the date of this incident? In what American port did it take place. Did the *Chesapeake* suffer any casualties from the broadside fired by the *Leopard*? I believe a Commodore James Barron was then in command of the *Chesapeake*, that he subsequently fought a duel with Commodore Decatur of the U. S. Navy, caused by bad feeling in the U. S. Navy over this incident, and that the duel resulted fatally for Commodore Decatur. Is all this correct?

We would like to pass the above queries along to *Adventure's* erudite readers—who over the years have seldom let each other, or *Adventure* down.

MR. C. B. LOOMIS sends in a here's-how note from Manhattan Beach, Cal., aimed particularly at such *Adventurers* who would free themselves of vaga-bondage, while indulging in vagabondia. "Tote a minimum," says Mr. Loomis—

The stuff people will pack when out for fun amazes me! A fish net (or half an old tennis net) will make a pup tent if small branches of evergreen or even brake ferns are hung in the holes to form a windbreak. Usually you can sleep tentless in all dry places. One stainless steel one quart frying pan will cook anything from coffee to biscuits and one dish per meal will feed you. One bowl will serve soup, coffee or cereal. A dessert spoon with the business

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end of a 4-tined fork welded at an obtuse angle to its edge, serves all eating needs, but a forked stick is enough fork—needless to carry since makeable in any bushed country. Use net to pack stuff—who wants a rack on his shoulders? Pack, rolled around waist with shoulder straps, if you like cool, dry-backed walking. Get a sheathed bowie knife and forget the axe. A handkerchief strains potatoes. Chipmunks and ground squirrels are good meat, easy to cook and so is wolf cub if you have luck. It tastes like peppery veal.

WE ARE pleased to pass along the following bouquet from reader to reader—*Adventure* thinks the gentlemen referred to are pretty terrific too.

Gentlemen:

Re: letters from Mr. Rex R. Benson and Mr. Frank A. Partridge in July issue:

AMEN

Could be I've read *Adventure* as long as Brothers Benson and Partridge.

F. J. Laraway
Albany, N. Y.

MR. HENRY D. WISMER, Los Angeles, California, describes the birth of a reader:

I am not your oldest reader but I started in 1919 when I was a machinist's apprentice. My superior was a boomer machinist who was an *Adventure* reader and gave me his old copies. I have missed very few copies since and prefer the old style cover to your current March copy. I have never read a story in this magazine that made me feel that the price I paid was wasted, and would like to thank the staff for consistently giving us the finest stories and the meetings at the *Camp-fire*.

I have quite a few books that came out after I read them in *Adventure Magazine*. I say keep on with the format that you have now. It stands out from other magazines.

Thank you and good luck.

TO THOSE readers who like their historical adventure yarns book-length, we might recommend *The Buccaneer*, by *Adventure's* Writers' Brigade member, William S. Furno, brought out by Dorrance.

And that brings us to another deadline. Thanks for pausing at the blaze.

E. G. J.

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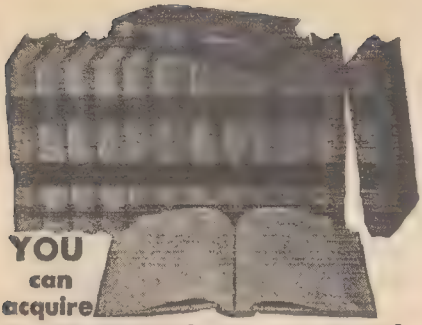

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(Continued from page 10)

you of the type of clothing one must wear in cold weather.

You can get as far as you want with your auto and trailer—find a good stream-side spot to camp and park there and hike on to any further location you may want to see, or hunt or fish, or prospect. I don't believe a jeep would serve you any better than a regular auto.

There are a number of good highways bisecting the entire area.

You'll find the Oregon people a friendly people—and the country a friendly country, with an abundance of wild life.

BOATS— SAILING

BUILDING a runabout.

I am constructing a 16-foot inboard runabout and, since this is my first attempt at boat-building, I need some competent advice. As I mentioned before, the boat is 16 feet overall and has a five foot, six inch beam, plywood planking and a semi-V bottom. As nearly as I can tell, the hull weighs about four hundred and fifty to five hundred pounds, with an approximate weight of one thousand to eleven hundred pounds when completed. Several people have advised me that I will be disappointed with my engine. It is to be a fully marine connected 60 V8 Ford. In your opinion, is this type engine satisfactory for marine use. The boat will be used only for pleasure and not extensively for that.

Another point that was worrying me is the use of the Ford transmission for a reverse gear. I am aware that it must be changed, but how, and to what extent? How can the clutch be used for this type of a job? I have many catalogues of the various companies who specialize in this, but the quoted costs are such that I will have to get by with something of my own making. Could you give me any pointers on this, or recommend a book?

Another question. What type of marine finish do you feel is the best? The boat will be used only in fresh water.

One thing more. The plans for this boat are of runabout style—two cockpits. How much difference in performance would it mean to make a utility model out of it—motor box, instead of deck and hatches. How much difference with a light, half cabin?

Bruce May
Kendrick, Idaho

Reply by Colonel Roland Birnn: With good marine conversion a 60 V-8 Ford motor does very well in a runabout and its output should give you good, although not

(Continued on page 104)

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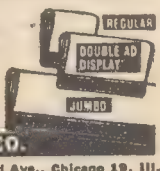

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West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1087, San Jose, Calif.

(Continued from page 102)

spectacular, speed. However, be satisfied with less speed and more safety if this is the first boat you've built, especially where you plan to build a small cabin forward. Of course, it all depends upon the design of your boat. If you've used a good stock design, one that has been tried and found to be O.K., much depends upon your manual skill in building the boat.

A marine, planetary transmission is always best in a boat. Yet it is not absolutely necessary. The standard Ford transmission will work all right. Some transmissions will work without a clutch throw when on a boat but I believe the Ford transmission must have its clutch mechanism left on and in use.

The disadvantage of the automobile transmission, apart from the clutch feature, is the small ratio for reverse. To make an adaptation you'll probably need the services of a *good* machinist, rather than a Ford mechanic. It *may* be possible to use a second speed gear for reverse. A good machinist, when he has the transmission disassembled, will know whether or not this can be done. Have him blank out first and second, leaving only high and reverse.

Don't forget to include an oil cooler.

On marine finishes. Any good marine paint is O.K. You don't *need* non-fouling paint in fresh water although non-fouling paints, such as Petit's Tropicop, will keep down grass growth underwater. Use Petitis hull and deck paint above the waterline. International Paints are fine, so are Cawlux, Smith's, New Jersey, and other paints catering to marine users. Do not use house paint, even the best. Do not use non-fouling paint except as directed on the can label.

There should be no noticeable difference in performance in making a utility model of it. Even a small half-cabin, if made of plywood and not too high, should not affect it much. But don't make that cabin too high or heavy.

SPORTS—
HUNTING

TRIMMING down a bow.

I have a bow that I wish to trim down.

It is a six-foot staff, inch and ¾ wide at middle, ¾ inch thick, made of Amazon River *chonfo* wood, used by the Tucana and Mosetena Indians for hunting anything from fish up to jaguar and tapir.

It pulls about 80 pounds.

Now then, to shave it down to about 60, what must I watch out for? Shave it at what point? Take from width or thickness? Treat it with what oil?

The wood comes from a palm, is long fibered, looks something like heavy, dark

bamboo, though, of course, without any knots.

And, by the way, where can I buy bowstrings?

LeRoy Kelsey
St. Petersburg, Fla.

Reply by Earl B. Powell: The only way to work down a bow as you describe, is to scrape it down on the belly side, the side next to you when shooting. Do not touch the sides or back. Treat it with boiled Linseed oil.

I suggest that you write to Ben Pearson, Inc., Pine Bluff, Ark., the biggest manufacturers of archery tackle in the U. S., about getting strings made.

DEER hunting in Minnesota.

We would like to have some archery pointers for left handed shooters.

We've gone deer hunting in Wisconsin the last few years but have not seen much game. Are Minnesota or Michigan any better?

The Klemme Archery Club has a twenty-eight target range.

Melvin R. Schaefer
Ventura, Iowa

Reply by Earl B. Powell: The technique for a left handed archer is exactly the same as for a right handed one, except that the person stands with the right side advanced and the bow in the right hand, drawing with the left hand.

I understand that there are a lot of deer in Michigan in the Neceedah and Allegan regions and suggest that you write to Roy Hoff, at 120 North Broadway, Los Angeles, California. He knows the region up there and will gladly help you.

VOCATIONS

SMOKE-JUMPING—a career in thrills.

I am interested in a part of the Forestry Service known as Smoke Jumpers. I understand the age limit is from eighteen to twenty-six years. I am nineteen years old and have a high shool education. Will you please send me information giving the qualifications needed to enter this form of service and where I might apply.

R. Wikarski
St. Clair Shores, Mich.

Reply by A. H. Carhart: There are two sections of the country where jumpers are used. In forest Region 1, up Montana way, and on forests of the west coast. It's rigorous business, but it supplies all the thrills anyone might seek.

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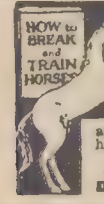

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

LOST TRAILS—John A. Thompson, mining engineer, and author of "lost" mine stories. Last heard living in a New York hotel, but may be anywhere. Please write to Raymond Dow, 2922—164th St., Flushing 58, N. Y.

I would like to locate a relative of mine.—His name is Edward F. Felden, most of the time called Eddie. When last heard of, in 1929, he was a salesman for the Smith Manufacturing Company of Fort Worth, Texas. His age would be in the middle forties, light brown hair, possibly greying. Write Sgt. Billy W. Fielden, AF 18338776 Hq. & Hq. Sqdn., 2225th Personnel Processing Group, Fort Dix, New Jersey.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of my father, William Blain Hingley. When last heard of he was in Spokane, Washington. Notify Mrs. Jim Henderson, Hot Springs, Montana, Box 462.

I would like to reestablish contact with Willis Threlkeld of Oklahoma, last seen at Fort Monmouth in the summer of 1946. George P. Calvert, 1380 Whitman St., Williamsport 21, Pa.

I wish to learn the whereabouts of Miler Edminston or any member of his family—wife, Nina, daughters, Gladys and Shirley, or son, Harry. The last I knew of them, they were in Willisville, Ill. He was a foreman of the construction crew which built the road between Ava and Willisville in '29, I think. Roy Crosby, R. 4 care of E. Beaubien, Caro, Mich.

I would like to locate Charles Lesweka who lives in Chicago, Ill. Thanks. Thomas M. Fuller, Annex 1 N. 750 South State St., Elgin, Ill.

I would like to contact MARIUS F. BOS, whose last address was Oriente Province, Cuba. Iast heard of him when we parted in Puerto Mexico, Veracruz. Also BILL BROOKS. We operated a saloon together in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. Please contact E. Livingston, 40 High Street, Reno, Nevada.

(Continued from page 59)

But an Englishman named Wickham had managed to smuggle out 70,000 seeds concealed in bales of wool and they had been planted in orderly rows in Ceylon and the Malay Peninsula. When the trees were old enough to tap, the job was easy. Gathering latex from a hundred trees concentrated on a few acres was quite different from scouring many square miles of jungle to find the same number.

Only the most productive strains were planted and they received such care as the wild tree in the jungle never knew. The plantation tree yielded between three and four times as much as the wild tree. And while an Amazon *seringueiro* could tend from fifty to one hundred and fifty trees, the plantation coolie could look after five hundred. Labor was scarce in Amazonia and plentiful in the Far East. The accident rate and death rate were high in the jungle, but low on a well-ordered plantation. And the plantations centering on Singapore and Colombo were on established steamer routes handling all sorts of cargo, whereas freighters had to come a thousand slow miles up the Amazon for only one product.

The Amazon bubble burst. The opera house closed its doors, the marble mansions were given over to the lizards, the dance bands went silent, the dark ladies packed their diamonds and sailed away. But the effect lingered.

The rubber debauch set the normal development of Amazonia back fifty years. Millions of rubber trees had been injured or destroyed by tappers interested only in a quick yield. All ordinary activities had stopped. It had seemed foolish to waste time producing anything else. Sugar cultivation had once been of primary importance in Brazil. It had been given up for rubber. The cultivation of maize, beans, mandioca, wheat, had died out. Worst of all was the moral setback. Twelve years of easy money had bred habits of extravagance and luxury that did not fit men for the hard task of pioneering a new frontier.

Only now, half a century later, is Manaos once more prosperous, this time on a firm basis of hard work. The Amazon is today not a get-rich-quick Eldorado, but the world's richest land of promise for men of vision and courage.

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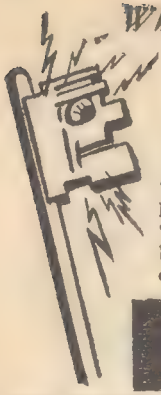

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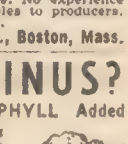

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(Continued from page 53)

"Fly the plane to Sidney," the pelt hunter suggested.

"Sidney hates planes," Joe said. "It takes sixteen men and a boy to get him aboard. Once aboard, though, he becomes aboard."

They landed a mile from Sidney and walked over a long stretch of frozen ground. "That strip of tundra the planes land on at Saint Lawrence Island is as rough," Joe said.

They flew to Joe's plane. Andy Ballard had completed repairs with the aid of two men who had flown the partners in with a ski-equipped job.

Joe said, "Andy, Sidney has lost weight. He's been in fights with bull moose and wolves. I'm afraid he's lost his love for man, and you know how he hates planes. I think we have a problem."

"You're president," Andy said. "I'll second any motion you make."

"I move we give Sidney a whirl."

Andy seconded the motion and they took off. Mike and the others followed in their respective planes. The three planes landed, and the DC-3 taxied within a quarter mile of Sidney. They tied down the plane, then brought out the ramp and made it secure.

"Now here's the plot," Joe said. "We rope Sidney, then we get him to the plane. We hog-tie him, then melt snow and pour the water on the ramp. It will freeze, and we can skid Sidney aboard."

"If he slips," a man said, "one of us is likely to be killed. Sidney isn't going to like any part—" He stopped talking and pointed. A ski plane was coming in low.

The plane landed near them and a brisk young man got out. He carried a newsreel camera and said, "I'm Ted Barstow. Sidney is news and I'm here for pictures. The bull has joined a bunch of caribou. Will you help me get some shots?"

They sneaked up on Sidney and took pictures of the bull striving to make a meal off of moss and lichens. When Barstow stepped into the open for close-ups, Sidney lifted his head. He had been photographed before at stock shows where there were warm barns and food. Sidney looked as if he might break down and blubber from homesickness.

Barstow joined the others, saying, "I'll set up my camera at the plane, while you boys lure Sidney to the ramp."

Joe waited five minutes, then he pulled a handful of hay from a sack and dropped it on the snow. Sidney never hesitated. He ate the hay, then got a move on. Joe had dropped another handful two hundred yards away. Joe broke into a run, with the others at his heels. Sidney was breathing down Joe's neck when the breathless men reached the plane. He dumped the last of the hay, then roped Sidney.

"Stand by the camera," Joe said. "All hands get hold of the rope and when I give the signal—heave! We've got to dump Sidney then tie his legs. Now don't get hurt. Remember—Sidney hates planes." His voice was filled with dire warning.

They dug their feet in like a tug-of-war team, and Joe opened his mouth to signal. He didn't have the heart to dump Sidney until the bull had eaten the last bit of hay. A raw gust of wind stirred the snow and rippled the hair on Sidney's side. Icy fingers stabbed through the bull's pelt and he shivered.

Gad, Sidney thought, *but it's cold.*

SIDNEY looked at the plane, then his eyes took due note of the ramp. As yet they hadn't dumped water on the ramp for skidding purposes. *I hate planes,* Sidney thought. The icy fingers clawed at him again. Sidney turned so suddenly, he sent the men sprawling. Then he almost ran up the ramp. The plane shook violently as the bull disappeared through the wide doorway and entered the crate.

"Anti-climax," Joe muttered. "We'll look pretty silly picking ourselves up off the snow."

"Great stuff," Barstow said. "I'll get a shot of your take-off."

Joe warmed the engines and turned on the heater. A low, happy rumble came from Sidney's throat as he felt the warmth. He was knocked against the crate several times as the plane took off, then he closed his eyes and chewed his cud.

Later Sidney looked through the nearest window. He saw the fenced areas of Matanuska Valley. Then he saw barns. He caught a glimpse of several good-looking women—not moose, or even caribou women, but cow-women. As the plane came to a stop, Sidney thought, *I hate planes, but they aren't bad when you can't find a barn.*

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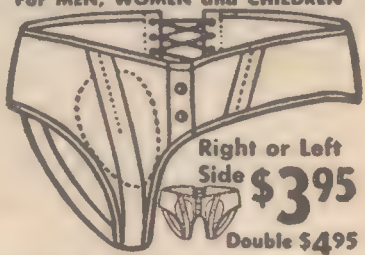

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(Continued from page 47)

our world was never better shown than the day a Tibetan came to me and said: "A prince is in the mountains. He awaits you."

We followed the guide for four days, wondering whether the prince would bring good or ill fortune. The guide led us along a path cut in the mountainside, through heights and valleys shrouded in mist. There, in a cave, we met Prince Bobru, an elderly and once-powerful Chinese merchant. And there, in his cave, we found how vast had been the change.

The prince in the cave had saved only eleven families as retainers and little worldly wealth. They surrounded him with the same reverence and respect that he had enjoyed when he was surrounded in luxury. Now he was penniless, ragged, and living on the scale of a Tibetan peasant. But Bobru had all the grandeur of his aristocratic lineage as he welcomed us, called for refreshments in the grand manner, and treated us to a display of old-world courtesy.

Good fortune seemed to have returned to our camps. Not only did the hospital receive Burygin and perform an immediate operation, but the Tibetan government took steps at once to apply for visas to allow us to cross into India. Further, a message concerning us was sent, without our knowledge, to the United States.

A few days before, we had shunned the Tibetan villages, camping outside and venturing in only after scouting the place to see if the Reds had yet arrived. Now I was guest of the Dalai Lama, who invited me to call on him, and I brushed up my scanty Tibetan for the occasion.

In fact, we waited eight months in Tibet for our visas, but the Tibetans did everything possible to assist us. We traded our guns and ammunition—guns that would soon be used against the Reds when the massed forces broke into the mountain kingdom. Once again, we had beaten them by a few months.

For most of us, the greatest city ever seen had been Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang province, with perhaps 25,000 inhabitants. Now we were issued visas and sent to Calcutta, to see the wonders of a railroad for the first time, to gape at the traffic in a great metropolis. Calcutta was bewildering, raucous, and poverty-stricken. If this was civilization, we thought, then we

had been fortunate people back in the villages of the Altai mountains.

It was 1952. Tatania had grown into a young lady on her travels. I had started little more than a boy and was now a man in charge of the whole party, as the great plane nonchalantly lifted the entire company of survivors from the village of Chinkure.

In twenty-four hours, we covered a distance equal to that which had taken us the last four years. We set down at Karachi, Basra, Switzerland and then Germany. From New York, it seemed, a few words scribbled on a telegraph form had achieved the miracle. We threw away rotting sheepskin coats, shaved our beards, and bought European clothes. The great sea had never seemed so small a distance to weary men, one indomitable woman, and a girl.

They called us solemn people when we reached New York. We were. We stood on the deck of the U.S. Navy transport *General Taylor,* and New York looked at us from behind flashlights and cameras.

There were nineteen of us, there on the deck. Twenty had boarded the *General Taylor.* But just before sailing, the doctors and the ambulance men had come to take old Karpov ashore, and the first news we received in New York was that he was dead. But I like to feel that he was content to have seen us to the end of the journey—the journey that cost him his life.

The future?

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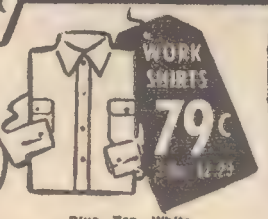

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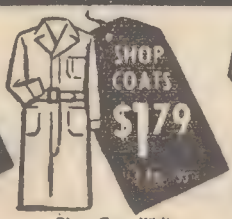

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(Continued from page 69)

to France. He was even proud of the *Tricoleur* curling languidly over his head and admitted that *La Marseillaise* had a good lilt to it which would endure.

He did not see the seaman who came up at him from behind. He didn't hear the warning shouts amid the crash of guns. He was only turning to greet Regnier, who was coming on deck, and that was why the seaman's knife missed his heart. His eyes were closed when Regnier shot the villain dead.

AS THE *Diomede* limped into Lorient, her orlop crammed with numb, mute prisoners, Lespard hesitated to leave his cabin. To do this, he had to go through the wardroom, and there were gathered the powder-blackened, grim officers of his command, their swords and pistols ready.

But at last, long after quiet murmuring and the shuffling of feet had told him that M. le Baron Fregault had been carried ashore, Lespard had to answer the admiral's impatient order to report in person to describe the details of his astonishing fight.

Regnier blocked his way out. "I'll never forget," Regnier said pointedly, "how M. le Baron challenged us all. Would you care to?"

Crushed by the seething eyes of the assembled officers, Lespard trembled. Deducing that they had chosen to massacre him in the guise of a duel, he nibbled his mustache and said nothing. He did not dare be defiant, or to be humble, or to order them aside, for these men were no longer his to sway or command.

"I thought not," Regnier said and snapped his fingers. Sartre produced a bottle. "M. le Baron insisted that you be accorded full credit for his magnificent victory. A matter of loyalty, *mon Capitaine*. Very admirable, don't you think, in view of what your creature did?" Regnier smiled slightly. "Of course, M. le Baron does not understand our new Navy and could not understand why you would like to be modest about this day's work."

"We wish to drink to your triumph," Sartre added, pouring wine for all.

Lespard shrank, for if these men were leopards, the captains at Brest were lurking cobras, who would seek his life in the myriad ways he knew so well.

"I will deny it!" he exclaimed. Then he stiffened in shame, for he was a man. It would be better to meet his own people than the thirsty captains at Brest. "Arrange your duel!"

Regnier's fingers nearly crushed the butt of his pistol, but his smile broadened and he lifted a wineglass instead. "M. le Baron would not approve, could he be here. As a matter of principle, you know."

"He doesn't know," Sartre said disgustedly. "Just tell him we will all give the same story about his saving the ship today no matter what he tells the admiral. Then, if one of his friends doesn't provide for him, we will."

The other officers of the *Diomede* nodded assent and raised their glasses.

And that was the greatest triumph of M. le Baron Raoul St. Etienne Fregault, permanently disabled in the service of his country—a legacy of a dozen officers devoted to honor and to France. Captain Lespard died mysteriously in Paris after receiving the *Legion d'Honneur* from the hands of the Corsican general himself.

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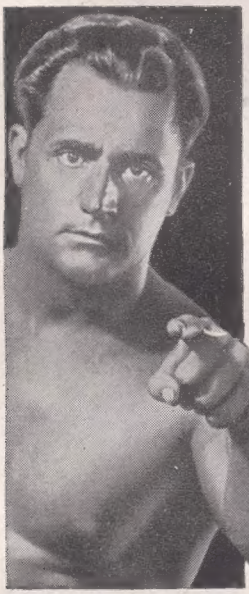

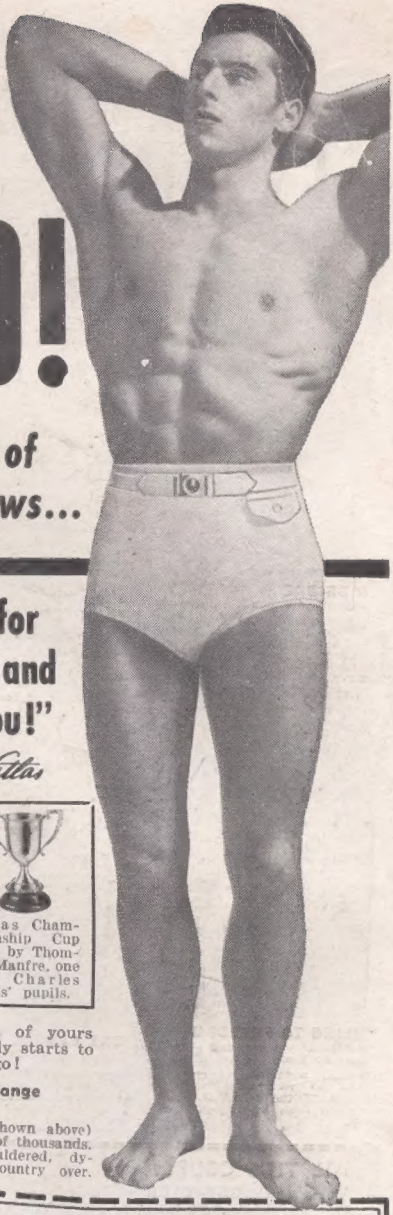

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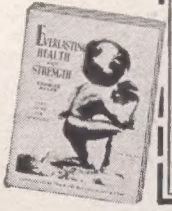

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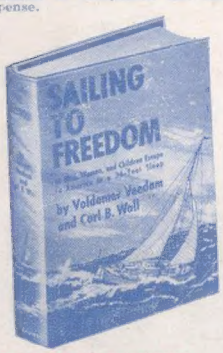

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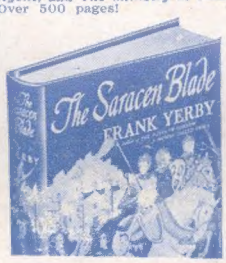

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